

# EXCLUSIVE: Attorney for ex-budget official calls idea for investigation into scandal ‘stupid’

House Republicans are calling for the formation of a bi-partisan legislative committee, though a federal criminal investigation is already underway

By Matt Caron

It's a story every taxpayer will want to hear. A scandal at the highest level of state government involving the alleged misappropriation of more than a billion dollars meant to build schools.

FOX61 obtained the federal subpoena that was served on the Lamont administration back in October. House Republicans seized the opportunity on Thursday to step to the microphone.

“We are calling for a

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bipartisan commission to be formed,” said State Rep. Vincent Candelora, the House Republican leader.

They called for the formation of a bipartisan committee to investigate the alleged misappropriation of more than a billion dollars, despite the fact that a federal criminal investigation is already underway.

Democratic leaders were seemingly in agreement.

“It absolutely makes sense for the Executive Branch to come before our legislative committees and talk about where the school construction program stands now,” said Speaker Matt Ritter and Majority Leader Jason Rojas in a joint statement. “Certainly the fact that there is an ongoing federal investigation is a grave concern,” added State Senate President Pro Tempore Marty Looney.

At the center of it all is Konstantinos Diamantis. He is the now-fired deputy secretary for the state budget office who allegedly bullied and intimidated local school leaders to forgo a competitive bidding process, and instead, hire specific firms at a higher cost to conduct school construction and demolition. If they didn’t, Diamantis allegedly threatened to withhold state reimbursement money.

“What the state doesn’t pick up, comes out of local property taxes. So if I know that there was a bid where someone was paying above what they should have, that’s coming out of my taxpayers’ pocket and that’s why I think every citizen who pays taxes in this state should be concerned,” remarked Republican State Rep. Holly Cheesman.

One of the more than 50 construction projects Diamantis is accused of inserting himself into includes the reconstruction of Bulkeley High School in Hartford. He

allegedly convinced the city to hire a more expensive firm.

Mayor Bronin sent FOX61 a statement that reads, in part, “When it was recently made clear that the state would not reimburse the costs for that firm, the contract with that firm was immediately terminated.”

FOX61 spoke exclusively to Diamantis’s Attorney, Norm Pattis, who denied his client broke any law.

“If a school official is really going to stand up and say a state official bullied me into abandoning my fiduciary responsibility to my municipality that person should step down from office,” remarked Pattis.

Pattis went on to suggest that the only misuse of resources is lawmakers forming a committee to investigate what’s already being investigated.

“It is about as stupid an idea as can be conceived by elected officials in any state in the United States and maybe even the third world,” said Pattis. “We hope they do have a robust investigation.”

While Mr. Diamantis is at the center of this investigation, the state budget office is under the ultimate oversight of Secretary Melissa McCaw and more broadly, Gov. Lamont.

FOX61 reached out to the Governor's office for a statement, and Communications Director Max Reiss provided a statement Thursday, saying,

“The Lamont administration would welcome public hearings into the school construction program by the General Assembly's committees of cognizance. Additionally, the Lamont administration has and will continue to be cooperative with federal authorities in a separate investigation. Governor Lamont took swift action to remove Mr. Diamantis when ethical improprieties were brought to his attention. It was also Gov. Lamont's initiation of an independent review which led to additional accountability. Gov. Lamont has zero tolerance for the types of actions which have been exposed.” ■