

# **New County Treasurer Admonished**

## **Commissioners Frustrated With Dartmouth Student**

**By John P. Gregg**  
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**North Haverhill** -- Top Grafton County officials are concerned that Treasurer Vanessa Sievers has yet to win approval to invest about \$10 million in county funds, with one suggesting the 20-year-old Dartmouth College student is in "over her head" and another seeking to take away her investment powers.

At yesterday's weekly meeting of the Grafton County Board of Commissioners, Commissioner Ray Burton faulted Sievers and said she "simply is not doing her job."

"It's very clear to me, speaking for myself, that we need a change," said Burton, a Bath Republican who moved to strip Sievers of her authority to invest and pass the duties to Deputy Treasurer Frank Stiegler, a former county treasurer who is an executive with Woodsville Guaranty Savings Bank.

The commissioners must approve investment plans from the treasurer's office.

Burton cited a state law that allows a deputy county treasurer to serve "only during the absence, disability or incapacity of the county treasurer."

Sievers has been an irregular presence at the county complex in North Haverhill since assuming the part-time office in early January and has relied on e-mail to conduct much of her county business.

Neither of the other two commissioners seconded Burton's motion, though Martha Richards, a Holderness Democrat, also said she was troubled by the situation.

"I'm concerned too, but I don't want to get into any partisan issues here either," Richards said. "I think she's kind of maybe over her head in some of this, and as a college student took on more than she could bite off, so to speak."

Sievers, who was not at yesterday's meeting, replied to a reporter's questions by e-mail late yesterday and said she was "shocked" to hear that there were still questions, after she had talked to county officials last week, about her work. She said she plans to resubmit an investment plan Tuesday and noted the money is now earning a better interest rate than it had been.

"The problem is not in my duties, it is in the communication between offices," she wrote in a lengthy e-mail response. "There should be no concerns that I am over my head and cannot perform my job ... I would hope that people look critically at my plan for what it is and not who it is submitting it."

The Dartmouth junior, a Montana native, made national news in November by defeating incumbent Treasurer Carol Elliott, a Plymouth Republican, for the office, which pays \$6,480 annually.

During the campaign, Sievers relied on Facebook ads to target college students in Hanover and Plymouth to win her Democratic bid.

Following the upset, Elliott suggested the college students had been “brainwashed” to vote for the Democratic ticket and called Sievers a “teenybopper,” drawing widespread rebukes.

The ensuing debate over whether college students from out-of-state should hold local office in New Hampshire, much less vote, has put more of a spotlight on Sievers' performance.

County officials said Sievers has been slow to finalize, and win approval, for her plan to reinvest county tax receipts after a one-month certificate of deposit account registry paying 1 percent interest matured on Jan. 22.

The fund had held almost \$10.8 million, but as the county draws on the fund for operating expenses, it now holds about \$9.8 million, according to county Executive Director Julie Clough.

At a Feb. 10 commissioners meeting, Chairman Michael Cryans, a Hanover Democrat, said the county was losing out on as much as \$540 a day because the money was sitting in a checking account paying just 0.25 percent interest.

Sievers had sent a last-minute e-mail to county commissioners laying out her proposal to reinvest the money, but did not attend the Feb. 10 meeting because she had to work at an on-campus job. She said she would try to be reachable by e-mail during the meeting, further frustrating county officials.

“For the record, I'm not voting for any e-mails or half-baked preparation as we received last time,” Burton said yesterday.

Richards also suggested that Sievers needed to pay more attention to the importance of face-to-face communication in government. “E-mail is their way of communicating at this stage, but there are protocols to be followed in county business,” she said.

Clough yesterday told commissioners she was able to work last Friday with officials at Woodsville Guaranty Savings Bank, where the money is currently being held, to move it to a money-market account paying 1.49 percent interest pending a more permanent investment plan.

County officials earlier this month also had to scramble and use a stamp with Sievers' signature on it to get the county payroll done because she couldn't make it to North

Haverhill from Hanover on that Thursday because of classes; she said yesterday she has since adjusted her schedule to resolve the matter.

Commissioners yesterday said they want Sievers to attend their weekly meeting next Tuesday and present a formal investment plan.

Cryans, the board chairman, refrained from criticizing Sievers during yesterday's meeting, but did acknowledge some frustration when asked for comment afterward.

"My goal is to get her in here next Tuesday and get a plan, get it layed out, and get it voted on," Cryans said. "Am I unhappy with her performance to date? Sure, I think we all are, but I'm not going to give up. I want her to fulfill her job -- she was elected by the populace of Grafton County -- and that's my goal."

For his part, Stiegler, who said he is paid \$25 a day when he acts as deputy treasurer, said he had taken the post to help Elliott and now Sievers, but said he refrains from discussing any investment decisions, saying it could be a potential conflict of interest, given his position at a bank that holds county money.

"I don't want the job back," he said of taking on more county treasurer duties, as Burton sought.

Sullivan County also has a new county treasurer this year, Dave French, a Langdon Democrat and retired lawyer who specialized in corporate finance.

Sullivan County Administrator Greg Chanis said yesterday he and French collaborated to invest \$2.5 million of county funds on Jan. 23 in a 30-day certificate of deposit paying 2.5 percent annually after an earlier round of accounts matured that same day.

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