

Goodman Prevails Against Ontario Integrity Commissioner

Leonard Goodman, founder of a Canadian life settlement trade group, says the Ontario government wrongly accused him of acting as an unpaid lobbyist before dropping its allegation.

By Donna Horowitz

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Leonard Goodman, who heads a Canadian life settlement trade group, said he beat back accusations by an ethics commission alleging he acted as an unregistered lobbyist when he advocated for passage of a life settlement bill.

Goodman, chairman and founder of the Life Insurance Settlement Association of Canada, posted the results of his battle with the Office of the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario on his group's website.

He said about a year ago he received a letter from the office accusing him of lobbying for Bill 219. The legislation would legalize life settlements and loans against policies in Ontario, the country's most populous province. But he said he told the ethics agency he was not going to respond unless it named who was behind the accusation.

Goodman believes the accusation came from the life insurance industry. The Canadian Health and Life Insurance Association, a trade group that represents life insurers, has taken a position opposing Bill 219. The group did not respond to a question asking if it had made the complaint.

Goodman said he received a few more letters from the agency in the summer or early fall and continued to ignore them. But he changed his tune about cooperating when he received a letter from an attorney for the commissioner saying the Integrity Office planned to file a court action against him. He said he didn't want to be held in contempt of court.

Goodman said he received a pleading giving him 20 days to respond. He was asked to attend a Zoom meeting and testify under oath, but he said he declined to attend unless Integrity Commissioner J. David Wake was present. He also demanded to be allowed to be given the first five minutes to address him. He said the Integrity Office agreed to both his requests.

Goodman said an internal hearing was held Feb. 23, which lasted two hours. He answered the Integrity Office's questions and sometimes invoked his right not to answer, defending himself against assertions that he had acted as an unregistered lobbyist.

He declined to provide documents from the Integrity Office, saying the government did not want to make its findings or the proceeding public.

An Integrity Office media representative did not respond to a request for comment.

But Goodman said he informed the Integrity Office he planned to make his statement public and thus posted it on LISAC's website.

He had argued that he wasn't a lobbyist under the province's laws because he didn't spend 50 hours a year on the legislation and wasn't paid by anyone.

"I was really pissed. I said, 'You've awoken a sleeping giant,'" Goodman said, adding that he planned to wage a media advertising campaign to encourage passage of the life settlement legislation.

On Friday, March 4, Goodman sent an email to supporters asking for donations to pay for the cost of his advertising effort. He hopes to raise \$100,000 for his nonprofit trade group to undertake the campaign and wrote that he already has contributed the first \$10,000.

"During the past 12 months I and LISAC have been bombarded by the provincial government at the behest of certain factions of the life insurance industry who weaponized the ministry in an effort to 'make me go away,'" he wrote.

"Finally, last week, and as a result of my determination not to concede, all the charges were dropped and the accusations withdrawn without the admission of liability or costs," his email said.

He added that in the past two years due to Covid-19 and his own health issues, "I have not persisted in my quest to have legislation changed!"

Others in Toronto, such as Paul Tyers, president of Canadian Life Settlements, and Warren Horowitz, a citizen activist, have taken the lead in pushing for Bill 219.

"This past 12 months' experience has angered me both as to process and attitude I experience, therefore they have awakened me. And I'm mad," Goodman wrote.

"This is a provincial election year, and I plan to awaken millions of Ontario seniors to this egregious wrongdoing," he said, referring to the June 2 election and seniors' inability to do life settlements in the province.

This is not the first time in recent months that advocates for passage of life settlement legislation have accused the government of impeding them.

Horowitz, no relation to this reporter, and Tyers have accused Ontario Finance Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy, a former executive of Manulife Financial Corp. (MFC), of stonewalling efforts to get a hearing before a finance committee. Bill 219 passed two readings in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario — the second one in October 2020 — but progressed no further. It would need three readings to win passage.

As to his experience with the Integrity Office, Goodman minces no words, saying: "It was a nuisance. I didn't lose any sleep over anything. I'm too old to be threatened by these goons and idiots. I'll be 82 this year."