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Arts council accused again of awarding grants in private; member quits, cites abuses of power

By CHANNING GRAY
Journal-Bulletin Arts Writer

PROVIDENCE — A member of the state's Arts Council, Mary Gammino-Antaya, has accused the agency's chairman, Daniel Lecht, of engaging in "appealing abuses of power," and has asserted that the council holds secret meetings and violates its own guidelines for awarding grant money.

Gammino-Antaya, a member of the council for two years, said she is so dismayed by council activities, and especially Lecht's behavior, that she has decided to resign. She explained her reasons in a letter, dated April 13, to Governor Narraby.

Gammino-Antaya said she decided to resign last week after council members met privately at the Brown University Faculty Club to decide how to distribute $30,000 that would revert to the state if it were not spent by the end of the fiscal year.

Some of that money, she said, is to be given to arts groups that have direct ties to council members.

TWO MONTHS AGO, the arts council, which then had been accused of violating the state's Open Meetings Law, assured the attorney general's office that it never again would discuss the awarding of grants in private.

Last Tuesday's luncheon at the Faculty Club violated "both the spirit and intent" of that promise, Mrs. Gammino-Antaya's letter to the governor said.

She wrote that Lecht said the private meeting "was to be called a luncheon for friends." He also explained how the council would be able to camouflage the decisions it made privately, she said.

He told the council members that when they met Thursday at their next public meeting, there would be "no discussion, but that we would vote for a budget that incorporated the funds — the allocations themselves would not be mentioned by name," the letter said.

Lecht declined to comment about Mrs. Gammino-Antaya's accusations.


Ernest Falclglla, another council member who attended the luncheon, said he viewed it as an informational meeting to discuss arts groups that might get surplus aid.

But he said he was not aware that any final decisions were made, and he added that he was not even certain about the amount of money at stake.

"I can defend the essence of it," Falclglla said of the meeting. "I feel it's public money, and if there are groups that deserve more money, it's incumbent upon us to give it to them."