

New South Wales politics

NSW Liberal MP uses parliamentary privilege to accuse party members of corruption

In claims referred to Icac, Ray Williams told parliament senior Liberal members were 'paid significant funds' by developer

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Fri 24 Jun 2022 07:15 BST

New South Wales' anti-corruption watchdog has been asked to examine corruption allegations - made by a state Liberal MP under parliamentary privilege - against members of the party's executive over last year's shock gutting of a Sydney council.

The Castle Hill MP Ray Williams on Thursday claimed in the NSW parliament that senior members of the Liberal party were “paid significant funds” by a prominent property developer to install new councillors on the Hills Shire council to get development applications through.

Former Hills Shire mayor Michelle Byrne and most of her party colleagues sensationally lost their positions on the Liberal ticket ahead of the 2021 council elections.

Williams told parliament that the incoming members had allegedly been installed to greenlight developments from Toplace - owned by high-profile developer Jean Nassif - which, he alleged, is a client of Liberal powerbroker and lobbyist Christian Ellis.

“Allegations have been raised with me that senior people within the NSW Liberal party, a member of the Liberal party state executive and former Hills councillor, were supported financially at the time by a large developer by the name of Jean Nassif,” Williams told the parliament.

“Toplace has one of the worst records in the residential building industry. According to media reports, Toplace continues to produce faulty apartments with serious building defects across the Sydney metropolitan area, including in my electorate of Castle Hill.”

Williams told parliament that, before the council elections, Nassif had “apparently” met with Ellis and other members of the Liberal party who were “paid significant funds in order to arrange to put new councillors” at the council to be “supportive of future Toplace development applications”.

The state’s premier, Dominic Perrottet, has since referred the claims to the Independent Commission Against Corruption (Icac).

“Late last night I was made aware of allegations made by the member for Castle Hill earlier in the evening and under parliamentary privilege,” Perrottet said on Friday.

“I immediately requested advice from the Department of Premier and Cabinet, which I received this morning.

“The advice stated that it would be appropriate to bring the matters raised to the attention of the Icac, which I have now done.”

Nassif has been a developer for almost three decades and is behind many of western Sydney’s biggest construction projects.

Without naming the person, Williams also claimed a previous Hills Shire councillor may have been in on the scheme.

“If Christian Ellis, senior members of the Liberal party, a former councillor and now member of the NSW parliament, received financial benefit from Jean Nassif of Toplace in order to put new councillors on the Hills Shire council who would subsequently be supportive of development applications on behalf of Toplace, then my community has good reason to be very concerned,” he told parliament.

“This issue must be investigated.”

Williams insisted the investigation needed to be conducted outside the party “due to the inherent conflict of interest”.

Guardian Australia has contacted Ellis, as well as Nassif, Toplace and Preston, for comment.

The opposition leader, Chris Minns, said the allegations were “obviously hugely concerning”.

“I’d urge the member for Castle Hill to take his concerns to the Icac if there’s any suggestion at all under any circumstances that someone has acted corruptly or has knowledge of corrupt activity.”

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Announcing her resignation from the council last year, Byrne - who had been backed by the centre right - expressed her concerns.

“I don’t agree with the process that has taken place within the Liberal party or how we got here,” Byrne wrote in her statement.

“There are many questions that remain unanswered that need to be answered. I have no doubt that what has happened in the Hills will continue to be scrutinised and so it should be.”