

Holton removed from tax breaks committee

Move follows city councilwoman's indictment on bribery charge

By Annie Linskey, Baltimore Sun, January 8, 2009

Baltimore City Council President Stephanie C. Rawlings-Blake has removed Councilwoman Helen L. Holton from her position as head of a committee that oversees tax breaks for developers, a day after Holton was indicted on a bribery charge.

The announcement came in a statement from a Rawlings-Blake spokesman to *The Baltimore Sun* this afternoon.

The powerful Taxation and Finance Committee will be chaired in the interim by William H. Cole IV, who had been vice chairman, until the criminal case is resolved, spokesman Ryan O'Doherty said.

Rawlings-Blake is "deeply troubled by the charges" filed against Holton, according to O'Doherty. "The council president has said that members of the City Council must abide by the highest ethical standards."

Holton was charged with accepting a bribe from prominent developer Ronald H. Lipscomb, the one-time boyfriend of Mayor Sheila Dixon, and then voting in favor of a tax break for a project he was involved in at Harbor East. Holton was also accused of perjury and misuse of office. A Democrat, Holton has represented West Baltimore since 1995. Lipscomb was also indicted yesterday -- he was charged with bribing Holton.

The charges are part of a nearly three-year investigation by the state prosecutor's office into spending practices at City Hall that has long seemed to focus on Dixon.

The indictment issued by a city grand jury accuses Holton of allowing Lipscomb to pay for a \$12,500 political survey while she was ushering tax breaks through the finance committee that benefited Lipscomb's projects.

Holton and Lipscomb, via their lawyers, have denied any wrongdoing.