

Mayor signs ethics bills into law

By Julie Scharper, *The Baltimore Sun*, April 21, 2010

Two measures intended to create a more independent and transparent ethics board and to strengthen guidelines for officeholder conduct were signed into law Wednesday by Baltimore Mayor Stephanie C. Rawlings-Blake.

The new laws are "an important step forward for Baltimore" and "represent one of the most sweeping changes to the Baltimore city ethics board in many years," said Rawlings-Blake, who sponsored one of the measures in one of her last acts as City Council president.

Concerns about the city's ethics law came to light during the investigation and criminal trial that eventually led to the resignation of Mayor Sheila Dixon.

The ethics bill law grants the council president and the city comptroller the power to nominate one member each to the five-person panel, a reform of the previous system in which each member was designated by the mayor, served at the will of the mayor or was nominated by a member of the mayor's staff.

City, county and state employees and lobbyists are prohibited from serving on the board under the new law and the board members' terms are staggered, meaning that future mayors will not be able to appoint a new slate, as they had in the past. The mayor will be required to appoint at least two members of the Maryland bar to the board and the members will choose their own leader, rather than letting the mayor appoint a chair.

At a news conference Wednesday, Rawlings-Blake presented three new nominees to the ethics board — Guy Flynn, a commercial real estate lawyer and partner at DLA Piper; Dawna Cobb, an assistant dean at the University of Maryland law school; and Linda Bowler Pierson, a grants administrator for several foundations. They must be approved by the council before they can be officially appointed to the board.

City Council President Bernard C. "Jack" Young also announced his nominee to the board, Jennifer Burdick, former director of the Maryland Human Relations Commission. Comptroller Joan M. Pratt is expected to name her designee in the coming days. Both choices must receive Rawlings-Blake's blessing before they are passed to the council for final approval.

Another ethics bill introduced by Councilman William H. Cole IV, clarifying the definition of who is considered as doing business with the city, was also signed into law by Rawlings-Blake.