

He helps public bodies investigate themselves

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The Ivy League was scandalized in 2002 upon the disclosure that computers on the Princeton University campus were used to improperly access Yale University's admissions database.

Princeton quickly announced an internal investigation led by a former federal prosecutor who, 12 years later, would perform a similar role for Sussex County Community College.

Attorney William F. Maderer's report resulted in Princeton transferring its admissions director and disciplining other employees. His findings satisfied the U.S. attorney in Connecticut, who closed an investigation without filing charges.

It remains to be seen whether his Florham Park-based law firm's report to the community college in Newton, on the circumstances surrounding a disputed campus building project, similarly will serve as the final word.

The college's Board of Trustees is expected to discuss the report, not publicly available as of Saturday, at Monday's 4 p.m. meeting. Paul Mazur, president of the college, has said he will forward a copy to state Acting Attorney General John Hoffman.

Maderer, managing member of Saiber LLC, has developed a niche in helping public entities investigate themselves.

While Maderer's 2002 investigation at Princeton produced critical findings, his investigation last winter of Rutgers University served as an exoneration.

Rutgers hired Maderer's firm after a football player claimed he was verbally abused by a former assistant coach, in the spring of 2013, and that the university mishandled the situation. The allegations were potentially very damaging to Rutgers, already reeling from revived bullying accusations from 1996 against its new athletic director, as well as the dismissal of its head basketball coach for hurling basketballs at his players and berating them in practices.

Maderer's 10-page report was co-authored with Saiber attorney DanaLynn Colao and released Jan. 26. It asserted that the football player, who quit the team, was the target of foul language but not bullied, nor subjected to retaliation. It concluded that Athletic Director Julie Hermann and the head football coach correctly handled the situation.

Largely accepted as the full story, the report headed off the crisis for Rutgers.

Expect some challenges to the credibility of the the community college's self-commissioned study, reportedly provided to board members Friday. Bill Weightman, the Democratic candidate for county freeholder, recently compared it to Gov. Chris Christie's decision to hire an attorney to investigate the George Washington Bridge lane closing scandal.

Vito A. Gagliardi Jr., a prominent attorney in Morristown who has known Maderer for two decades, characterized him as thorough and impartial.

"If you're looking for someone to do a whitewash report, you wouldn't hire Bill Maderer," Gagliardi said.

"He's got a sterling reputation," added Gagliardi of Maderer, former president of the Association of the Federal Bar of the State of New Jersey (AFSNJ).

Maderer began his law career in 1974 with a six-year stint in the U.S. attorney's office in New Jersey. His firm employs about 70 attorneys and operates out of five offices. His specialties include white-collar criminal defense, business litigation and higher education law, according to the law firm's website.

Maderer did not agree to an interview with the New Jersey Herald, but confirmed some details about his career via email.

He was on the AFSNJ's Board of Trustees when the organization, in 2001, criticized Christie's nomination as U.S. attorney. Christie, at that time a former Morris County freeholder working as a lobbyist and Republican fundraiser, was picked by President George W. Bush despite lacking criminal law experience.

Christie went on to successfully prosecute a wide range of public officials, setting the stage for his successful run for governor. Along the way, he apparently gained Maderer's respect, at least for his work as U.S. attorney.

Asked in December 2008 about his early opposition to Christie, Maderer was quoted by the Star-Ledger as saying, "It just shows how wrong people can be."

Three months later, Maderer contributed \$300 to the re-election campaign of then-Gov. Jon S. Corzine, a Democrat defeated by Christie in November 2009.

Maderer, who declined to identify his party affiliation, is among the many attorneys involved in the Bridgewater saga. He represented an unnamed state official interviewed April 7 at the U.S. Attorney's Office in Newark, according to billing records.

Despite Maderer's prominence, he was mostly unknown in Sussex County before undertaking the college investigation. Conversely, while his prior investigations at Princeton and Rutgers drew national attention, the complex saga at the community college has drawn little notice outside Sussex County.

The college board's 7-1 vote in May to award a much costlier-than-expected contract, currently on hold, to renovate the main academic building sparked allegations of cronyism and conflicts of interest.

One of the two board members appointed by Christie, former freeholder Glen Vetrano, resigned July 22 upon acknowledging an annual stipend from an engineering firm, CP Engineers, used by the college.

Vetrano failed to include his CP Engineers income on his state-required disclosure form in May.

Mazur, on the same day Vetrano resigned, sent a letter to Hoffman. In it, Mazur alluded to questions being reviewed by Maderer's firm, including "the competence of the engineering firm we have been using and ethical considerations regarding three of the Trustees, who have ties to the engineering firm."

Mazur did not name the three trustees, but the other two reportedly are Glenn Gavan, the board's chairman, and Ed Leppert, Christie's other appointee on the 11-member board.

Beyond what the report says, the big question is whether it will signal the end of an unpleasant episode for the college or trigger an additional inquiry.

The only sure thing, it would seem, is that another institution in crisis soon will be seeking out Maderer.