

The Star-Ledger

Corzine appeals Katz e-mail ruling

Saturday, August 09, 2008

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Associated Press

Lawyers for Gov. Jon Corzine yesterday appealed a judge's order to release e-mails the governor and his staff exchanged with a union leader he once dated.

The administration argues that the governor's communications fall under executive privilege and should remain private.

In a 54-page brief filed with the Appellate Division of Superior Court, the state argued that the trial court ruling is inconsistent with the state constitution.

"As the Supreme Court of New Jersey has recognized, for the executive branch to function effectively, the chief executive must be free to receive, consider and participate in candid communications," the brief states.

In May, Superior Court Judge Paul Innes ruled that e-mails Corzine and his staff exchanged with Carla Katz during state worker contract talks in 2006 and 2007 were public information.

Corzine and Katz wanted the messages kept private. But Innes ruled the relationship between the governor and the leader of the state's largest labor local "created a clear potential for conflict" that the public had the right to understand.

The administration contends that if allowed to stand, the ruling would allow for access to e-mail conversations from the governor "on any issue of interest to anyone who asks."

Katz lawyer Paul Fishman said he filed a notice of appeal Thursday, and will file a brief outlining his argument for reversal within weeks.

Innes' decision stemmed from a lawsuit filed by Tom Wilson, the state Republican Party chairman. Wilson questioned whether the e-mails tainted the state worker contract talks.