

CITY NEWS

Emails Show Push for Cathie Black

BY LISA FLEISHER

City emails released Thursday offered the first look at how the Bloomberg administration aggressively tried to build support in 2010 for Cathie Black, the mayor's choice for schools chancellor, amid growing criticism of the appointment.

The emails showed that Ms. Black, a former Hearst executive, and administration officials sought support from allies, including an endorsement from Oprah Winfrey, as City Council members tried to block the appointment.

The Bloomberg administration released the emails late Thursday after losing a court fight to keep them private.

The city's lawyers had argued that the emails between the chancellor-elect and the administration should be shielded under the same principle that prevents public disclosure of internal discussions among employees already in office. After the release, city lawyer Susan Paulson said in an emailed statement that it would discourage public service because of the "chilling prospect of public disclosure."

On Nov. 9, 2010, Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced that he would appoint Ms. Black, who had no experience in education.

As opposition lined up to block the appointment, Ms. Black asked in an email message

whether City Hall should change course.

"Is our strategy working?" Ms. Black wrote on Nov. 16, ref-

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erencing an unflattering New York Times story. "Do we have to take another course? Or hold

steady? I am ok, honestly. Just need verification!"

Micah Lasher, a former top Bloomberg lobbyist, told her to stay the course. "All our focus needs to be on getting allies to come out in support and on getting you prepared for a debut as soon as possible," he wrote. "We will make a few more base-covering calls, but clearly the political community will do what they will do. We will be fine."

The emails showed that the administration reached out to elected officials across the state, as well as prominent feminists and successful women such as Ms. Winfrey and Caroline Kennedy, the daughter of former President John F. Kennedy and former fundraiser for city

schools.

Ms. Black reached out to Ms. Winfrey, asking her in an email to tell a Daily News reporter why she would make "a great schools chancellor."

"Tremendous leadership, excellent manager, innovator, mother of two and cares about the future of all children," she wrote. "Grace under pressure."

Ms. Black and Ms. Winfrey couldn't be reached for comment late Thursday. Mr. Lasher didn't return a request for comment.

When the endorsement from Ms. Winfrey made the front page of the Daily News, Stu Loeser, the mayor's spokesman, sent an email with the subject line "Oprah knocked crime off the cover of the Daily News" to top

Department of Education and City Hall staff members.

Amid criticism while under an intense media spotlight, Ms. Black resigned on April 7, 2011.

The emails cover a short time span, from Nov. 3, 2010, through Nov. 18, 2010, the day before a former Village Voice intern, Sergio Hernandez, filed a public records request for Ms. Hearst's emails.

On Thursday, the New York State Court of Appeals denied the city's final attempt to block the emails' release. The city spent more than 168 hours and more than \$25,461 fighting the release, Mr. Hernandez said, according to documents he received under a separate records request.

Early-Morning Blaze in the Bronx Spreads to 11 Other Buildings, Knocks Out Subway Service



Peter Foley for The Wall Street Journal (2)

FIVE-ALARMER: A fire that began in a commercial building on White Plains Road in the Wakefield neighborhood Thursday grew quickly before being declared under control at about 9:45 a.m. Ten firefighters were injured.