

# County board calls for resignation of road commissioner

■ Jeff Zink said he apologized for a remark made at a road commission meeting that was termed inappropriate and offensive to people with disabilities.

**BY DEAN COUSINO**

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Monroe County commissioners are seeking the resignation of Road Commissioner Jeff Zink for a comment he made at a road board meeting last month that was offensive to a road commission employee in the audience who has a disability.

County commissioners voted 8-0 Tuesday night to send a letter from the board to Mr. Zink asking that he resign immediately for

making a comment at a Sept. 22 meeting that was deemed offensive to people with disabilities.

The board made the move after Gary Williams, a road commission employee for almost 14 years, and his wife, Chrissy, brought the matter to the board.

"It deeply hurt me," Mr. Williams told the board. "I was at the meeting because I wanted to

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— Jeff Zink

road commissioner

get more involved at work. When he said what he did, I raised my hand to speak and said, ‘Are you kidding me?’ It hit me hard.”

Mr. Williams, 50, lost two fingers on his left hand and the tips of two other fingers on his right hand from an accident in 1998. He once worked as a mechanic for the county agency but is now working with the drain tile crew.

According to Mr. Williams and Commissioner David Hoffman, who was at the road meeting, the board was discussing a request from Managing Director Randy Pierce to hire a mechanic because the department was short of help.

The board backed the idea and Mr. Zink commented, “If you’re short-handed, make sure you hire a guy with 10 fingers,” Mr. Williams said.



**JEFF ZINK**

## Zink (cont.)

Reached at his home Tuesday night after the meeting, Mr. Zink expressed surprise and remorse at hearing about the letter to be sent him.

He said the comment was made in jest, not to humiliate anyone. He added that he didn't know Mr. Williams was in the audience until the man raised his hand to speak.

"When I saw his hands, I felt bad and you can imagine my embarrassment," Mr. Zink, 64, said. "My humor got the best of me. I could clearly see his hands. I felt horrible. That's not what I meant. It was in reference to the department (needing workers). Period."

Mr. Zink said he apologized that night at the board meeting, but that was disputed by Mr. Williams, who said the commissioner didn't offer any regrets.

"I'm sorry anybody took offense," Mr. Zink said. "I don't go around intentionally trying to hurt someone."

Mr. Hoffman backed the road commissioner's statement that he apologized during the meeting. But Commissioner Robert Lambert, vice chairman of the county board, said there was no evidence of that in either the minutes or a recording of the meeting.

It was Mr. Lambert who made the motion to send the letter, saying the comment was totally inappropriate. He said most of the board had just learned about the incident Tuesday.

"I can't explain how appalled I am," the vice chairman said. "You can't make

comments about people with disabilities. He's an appointee to the board. Apologizing is one thing, but when you make a statement like that, that's unacceptable. We have the authority to ask for his resignation."

Virtually every county commissioner present Tuesday criticized Mr. Zink for the comment. Chairman Jerry Oley, Mr. Pierce and other commissioners apologized to Mr. Williams. Mr. Oley said Mr. Zink was one of three members commissioners will consider for reappointment this fall.

"This saddens me. There's no place for it," Mr. Oley said. "It did occur, and these are things we have to deal with."

Mrs. Williams said Mr. Zink's comment was even more offensive to her, even though she was not present at the time.

"Something needs to happen," she told the board Tuesday. "My husband is hard-working and father to our children and does not deserve to be treated like that. If he can't hold his feelings, then he has no right to be in that position."

Commissioner Al Potratz seconded the motion to send the letter. He said he is handicapped, too, and angry about the comment.

"It's unnecessary and very much uncalled for," Mr. Potratz said. "My apologies to you and your family."

Mr. Zink has served since Jan. 1, 2013. His seat and those of Road Commissioners Scott Davidson and Joe Schumaker will come before the county board for reappointment later this year.