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Convicted rapist quits Australian parliament after losing legal bid to stay

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ABC News/Justin Huntsdale

Gareth Ward's resignation triggers a by-election in Kiama

An Australian politician and convicted rapist has resigned from parliament moments before he was to be kicked out, after losing a legal challenge to remain.

Gareth Ward, 44, was last month found guilty of sexually assaulting two young men, aged 18 and 24, between 2013 and 2015, and is now in custody pending sentencing.

Earlier this week, Ward launched a legal bid to stop the New South Wales (NSW) parliament from expelling him, but it was dismissed on Thursday after the court rejected arguments that the move was an "affront" to democracy.

Plans to expel him on Friday were thwarted when, less than two hours before a vote to remove him was due, Ward quit as the independent member for Kiama.

Australian politician Gareth Ward found guilty of rape

Ward's resignation letter was received by parliament at 09:08 local time on Friday (00:08 GMT), shortly before a vote at 10:30 was due to expel him.

His resignation - which comes years after the sexual assault accusations first emerged - means Ward will no longer receive a parliamentary salary.

It also triggers a by-election in the south-coast NSW electorate Ward has held since 2011.

In 2021, Ward quit as a state government minister and left the Liberal Party, but refused to leave parliament and was re-elected in 2023.

During his legal challenge, Ward's lawyers argued that attempts to kick him out of parliament before the appeals process was finished was "an affront to the foundations of representative democracy".

NSW Premier Chris Minns told the media on Friday that Ward's resignation "should have come earlier".

"If you are convicted of some of the most serious charges - sexual assault in NSW - you can't sit as a serving member of parliament drawing a parliamentary salary," the Labor leader said.

"How can you represent your community from behind bars?"

Opposition leader Mark Speakman labelled Ward's legal bid to stay in parliament "disgraceful", and accused the former MP of "playing games" with the public and parliament.

Ward, due to be sentenced next month, has said he intends to appeal the guilty verdict.

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