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The BBB has insisted that it made the change nationally from the traditional satisfactory-unsatisfactory ratings to make the BBB website a more useful tool for consumers, not to bring in more money.

Blumenthal, who is investigating the BBB in Connecticut after the state chapter last November awarded its highest honor to a remodeling company he is now suing on fraud charges, said he is following Rivers' blog with interest. It would be greatly troubling, he said, if it turned out that the bureau's real motivation in changing the grade system was to create a "pay to play" scheme.

He said he will ask the [California](#) attorney general for help in investigating Rivers' claims about the rating system.

The BBB did not respond to my request for comment Friday. It may have been because its top national public relations officer, [Steve Cox](#), sent out an internal memo last month telling local BBB officials not to respond to accusations in Rivers' columns with the hope that no one from the "mainstream" media would give it credence.

That internal e-mail was provided to me by Rivers and can be found on my blog, [courant.com/ctwatchdog](#).

I sent Cox an e-mail after posting his memo, suggesting to him that his strategy may not be working as well as he expected.

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