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## Police chief protests denial of pay

By Margot LeSage  
*Staff Writer*

ATKINSON -- Police Chief Philip V. Consentino plans to file a complaint with the state's labor board if selectmen continue to deny him and a police sergeant pay he said they are owed for not signing up for the town's health insurance plan.

Consentino, who is also a selectman, said he and Sgt. William Baldwin each submitted vouchers to the town's bookkeeper seeking about \$1,300. The vouchers, he explained, are for a medical benefit given to police union members, allowing those who do not take the town's health insurance plan to have \$1 per hour added to their pay.

Consentino and Baldwin are not union members because of their rank.

After the union contract was approved three years ago, all officers received the same benefits, including 3 percent raises; life, accidental death and dismemberment insurance; court pay and clothing allowances.

Consentino said selectmen Chairman Brian Boyle told the bookkeeper not to pay him or Baldwin.

In a closed-door session last week, Consentino said Boyle and Selectman Fred Childs had a lengthy discussion with him over who should receive certain benefits.

In a memo to police officers dated Nov. 23, Consentino informed his officers of the discussion and asked that certain officers not use the remainder of their clothing allowance until the issue is resolved.

Boyle and Childs believe the union contract speaks for itself, indicating that anyone who is not a member of the bargaining unit would lose the benefits being received for the past three years, the chief wrote.

All police officers are eligible to join the union unless they are

above the rank of corporal, on call, temporary or on probation. In Atkinson, all new police officers are on probation for a year.

Consentino, a member of the Police Department for more than three decades, said he doesn't understand how his \$300 clothing allowance can be suddenly taken away.

"For 36 years, I have gotten a clothing allowance and now all of a sudden I'm not getting a clothing allowance because I am not in the bargaining unit. I can't be part of the bargaining unit because I'm the chief of police," Consentino said, adding that Sgt. Diane Kinney has been with the department for 27 years and has received a clothing allowance each year.

Last night, 15 of the town's police officers -- union members and nonunion members -- appeared before the Board of Selectmen to question the board about its decision to discontinue the granting of certain benefits to nonunion members. Consentino recused himself from the board and sat with his officers.

"The past practice has been that for the past three years the contract has been in place, those officers not eligible or part of the bargaining party got the same basic benefits as those in the union," Consentino said. There are 11 people with the Police Department who are not eligible to join the union because of rank, probation or being designated an on-call officer.

"I don't feel it's fair, I don't feel it's accurate, and I don't feel it's aboveboard for you to arbitrarily decide to have benefits taken away," he added.

The chief also stressed he doesn't care about the money he would be losing.

"It's the principle," he said.

Boyle and Childs vehemently denied they decided to take benefits away from nonunion police officers. They did say, however, that on advice of the town's attorney, benefits granted to nonunion police officers by selectmen should also be given to all town employees.

They also denied seeing the two vouchers in question.

The pair also said that for now, no changes in benefits to nonunion members will be made, but the board needs to decide how to proceed with this situation.

"I will always make my vote as fair as humanly possible," Boyle said. "When we make a decision, we have to make it with everybody in mind."

Answering Consentino's claims that Boyle is against the Police Department and the union, Boyle said that without him the union would not have a contract because he helped negotiate the latest agreement.

"I brought them back to the table and we got an agreement," he said. "Before you paint me as the big, bad guy, let's get the record straight."

Boyle also told Consentino he was "out of line" after the chief continued to insist that he answer why he told the town's bookkeeper not to pay him or Baldwin and why his clothing allowance was to be axed.

Childs told the police officers that they should have come to speak with the selectmen first before coming en masse to the meeting last night.

"There's no reason to have this discussion tonight," Childs said, obviously frustrated with the chief's allegations.

Officer Justin Paquette, a shop steward with the union, said the officers attended the meeting to "show solidarity" for those whose benefits may be at risk. He said all of the officers are troubled by the fact that officers who are on probation are not eligible for life, accidental death or dismemberment insurance when there is a risk they may be injured.

Paquette also explained that officers eligible to be union members do not have to join the bargaining unit. This is why it is important that the same benefits be extended to those not in the union so as to not discriminate against those who decide they do not want to join, he said.

Union members would like to meet with selectmen to discuss issues involving benefits for nonunion police officers, Paquette said.


"We need to hammer this out so people aren't losing anything," Paquette added.

Both Childs and Boyle agreed to sit down with the union to resolve the issues.

After the meeting, Baldwin said he wants the officers to

receive fair benefits "across the board."

"There shouldn't be a discussion about if you're in the union or if you're not in the union," he said, noting that being in the bargaining unit does give those officers benefits, namely legal representation and grievance procedures.

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