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Chief's work may be halted

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ATKINSON -- Police Chief Philip V. Consentino's own words may come back to haunt him.

Chief Consentino, 59, Atkinson's controversial police chief, often boasts he's the town's best bargain because he works full-time hours, but is paid a part-time salary.

In fact, he even sent a letter to residents several weeks ago in which he said the town "basically has a full-time police chief," because he works from 35 to 45 hours a week, according to a complaint filed with the state Police Standards and Training agency by Atkinson resident and former police officer Dale A. Childs.

However, part-time certified officers, whether rookie patrolmen or longtime police chiefs, are limited to working 1,300 hours a year because they are not trained as full-time officers, according to Earl M. Sweeney, the agency's director.

Because of that, a state Police Standards and Training investigator will probe Chief Consentino's department to see if he works more hours than state law allows, Mr. Sweeney said yesterday.

"The more you are out there, the more exposure you have, the more you should be trained," Mr. Sweeney said.

Chief Consentino declined yesterday to comment on the audit or Mrs. Childs' complaint.

Chief Consentino's letter, sent days before residents amended a petition calling for a full-time chief at the Feb. 12 Deliberative Session, also stated he makes \$17,708 a year, receives no benefits and hasn't taken a vacation in two years.

"This would mean on an average, he has worked approximately 2,000 hours a year for the last two years," wrote Mrs. Childs, who signed the petition. She was out of town and unavailable for comment yesterday.

In 1995 Mrs. Childs also was the subject of an investigation into the number of hours she worked as a part-time police officer after someone filed an anonymous complaint with the state.

Following the investigation, she was ordered to work 103 fewer hours in 1996 and was cautioned not to do it again, she wrote.

A state compliance investigator will audit the Atkinson Police Department within the month. In addition to the chief's hours, all officers' work hours and the amount of training they receive will be investigated. The agency typically performs an audit after a complaint is filed, Mr. Sweeney said.

When the investigator completes his report, the Police Standards and Training Council will determine whether to hold a hearing to question Chief Consentino.

If the board determines Chief Consentino violated the rule, he could face a range of sanctions. The board, which is comprised of 12 law enforcement officials including the attorney general, could reprimand him, require him to work fewer hours next year or strip him of his part-time certification, Mr. Sweeney said.

The audit is the latest in a series of controversies that have flared in the Police Department since December, when Chief Consentino was ordered by the state Public Employee Labor Relations Board to stop intimidating officers. He denies intimidating officers who were involved in forming a union, and is appealing the order.

In January officers voted 6-5 to form a union, and 48 residents signed a petition calling for Chief Consentino to be replaced by a full-time police chief by July 1. That petition was changed Feb. 12 by Chief Consentino's supporters who voted to make the chief's position full time in 2010.

Each year police chiefs are required to submit a form certifying the number of hours worked by their part-time officers and themselves.

Mr. Sweeney said he had not yet checked Chief Consentino's records.

Though, he said, if the form indicated Chief Consentino worked more than the cap, an audit likely would have been completed sooner.

One of the issues that will be looked into is whether Chief Consentino views some of his hours to the town as volunteer service. Still, Mr. Sweeney said, the only time exempted from the cap is time spent testifying in court and in training.

"As far as I'm concerned, 1,300 hours is 1,300 hours. I don't care if you give it to me or got paid for it," Mr. Sweeney said.

Selectmen Chairman Joseph A. DeRosa said selectmen several years ago set Chief Consentino's hours at 24.5 a week. He said the chief does not have to record the hours he works as the uses the honor system.

However, in light of the audit and because of previous investigations, Mr. DeRosa said he wants selectmen to consider implementing a system to record hours.

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