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Chief to slash workload

By Krista Zanin

Eagle-Tribune Writer

ATKINSON -- Police Chief Philip V. Consentino violated a state law by working more hours than state regulations permit.

The state Police Standards & Training Council agreed yesterday Chief Consentino works more than 1,300 hours a year. He must submit a plan telling the panel how he will now work fewer hours, said Earl M. Sweeney, the agency's director.

"The council voted to find that the Atkinson Police Department is currently in violation of the 1,300 hours rule as it is structured and the chief has been in effect working more than 1,300 hours a year," said Mr. Sweeney.

Part-time officers -- whether rookie patrolmen or longtime police chiefs -- are required to work fewer hours than full-time officers because they do not have as much training.

Chief Consentino said he's going to have to spend fewer hours on senior citizen programs.

"The only thing to come out of this is the senior citizen program is going to have to be backed off a little bit," said Chief Consentino, who added the council isn't aware of Atkinson police working more with the elderly than happens in other towns.

He said he hoped Community Services Officer William L. Anderson will pick up the slack so seniors will "not be left high and dry."

The council made its decision after meeting in private with Chief Consentino, 59.

Two senior citizens, Chief Consentino's wife, Joanne "Jodi" Consentino, and Officer Anderson also spoke on his behalf.

The council didn't discipline Chief Consentino and will wait to see the plan before deciding what to do when it next meets July 25. The chief has 30 days to turn in a plan after he receives a letter from the council.

Officers violating the rule face a variety of sanctions. They can simply be reprimanded; ordered to work fewer than 1,300 hours depending on how much they worked over the limit; or stripped of their certification.

Chief Consentino said he doesn't expect he will be docked hours or have his certificate revoked.

Yet, Dale A. Childs, an Atkinson resident who filed the complaint regarding Chief Consentino's hours, said it's not fair if the agency doesn't require him to work far fewer than 1,300 hours.

"Nobody else got a 30-day plan," said Mrs. Childs, a part-time Hampstead police officer who also was found in violation of working more hours than allowed in 1995.

Mrs. Childs had to work 103 fewer hours -- or 1,197 hours in 1996 -- after someone filed an anonymous complaint with the state agency.

"I was just told I was in violation of the rule and had to cut back hours the next year," said Mrs. Childs. "If they don't do the same with him then it's discrimination."

Mrs. Childs didn't attend yesterday's hearing as she was at Rockingham County Superior Court for a Hampstead police matter.

Mrs. Childs, who used to work under Chief Consentino, filed the complaint after he sent residents a letter boasting about his experience and saying "the town basically has a full-time police chief" because he works between 35 to 45 hours a week and is only paid a part-time salary.

He sent the letter days before residents amended a citizens petition at the Feb. 12 Deliberative Session calling for a full-time chief that would have replaced Chief Consentino by July 1. Residents voted to change the petition to July 1, 2010.

Mrs. Childs signed the petition along with 48 other residents, including John F. Kiley, who also complained to the state about the chief's hours.

State Police Standards & Training's audit of the Atkinson police department revealed other officers work within the limit and are trained appropriately. The only question was the chief's hours, Mr. Sweeney said.

Chief Consentino said he works less than 24 hours a week on his administrative duties, but spends 10 to 15 hours a week on senior citizen issues.

"I will oblige with whatever the Police Standards & Training Council wants," he said. "It's a shame they are looking at it that way."

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