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Town silent on chief's latest flap

By Krista Zanin

Eagle-Tribune Writer

ATKINSON -- Selectmen last night refused to talk in open session about why Police Chief Philip V. Consentino asked one of his officers to take a picture of an unmarked Hampstead police cruiser parked on resident Dale A. Child's property.

Mrs. Childs asked to talk to selectmen about the incident in public, but selectmen said it needs to be discussed in executive session because it involves personnel. They cited a state law allowing boards to meet in secret when an issue involves public employees.

Selectmen Chairwoman Barbara L. Stewart said the employee being talked about, Chief Consentino, has a right to decide if the meeting is open or closed.

"By law we're bound and so it's a stalemate," she said.

Mrs. Childs, who is a part-time Hampstead police officer, refused to talk about the incident in secret, saying it would have been a "waste of time."

"If it's not going to get out (in the public) then what's the sense," she said after the meeting ended.

Chief Consentino left the meeting after giving his weekly report and before Mrs. Childs asked to speak.

Mrs. Childs contends she is being harassed by the part-time chief because she filed a complaint with the state Police Standards and Training agency regarding the number of hours he works. The state is investigating her claim he works more than the 1,300 hours a year work to which certified part-time officers are limited.

Chief Consentino has said he is not harassing Mrs. Childs. He has said he is conducting a private "inquiry" about her as a resident and not as police chief. He declined to say what he is looking into. He has said he asked Community Services Officer William Anderson to

take the picture as a favor to him, and that Mr. Anderson did so as a resident and not a town employee.

As part of his "inquiry," Chief Consentino also wrote a letter to a Hampstead selectman and then Deputy Chief Joseph Beaudoin about the number of hours Mrs. Childs works.

Both Hampstead Police Chief Beaudoin and Selectmen Chairman Joseph A. Guthrie have said Hampstead is not investigating Mrs. Childs and that she is allowed to keep the cruiser at her home.

Mrs. Childs said she does not protest any inquiry, but protests having her personal space "compromised."

Mrs. Childs, who was one of 48 registered voters to sign a petition calling for a full-time chief, also questioned whether selectmen called in a Rockingham County Sheriff's deputy to eject her from the meeting if she protested talking about the chief in executive session. The deputy was sitting in Town Hall.

Mrs. Stewart said the deputy, who arrived a few minutes before the meeting and asked to speak with selectmen, came to talk with selectmen about another matter. She declined to elaborate.

Another petition signer, John Kiley, asked selectmen if they were going to conduct an investigation regarding the chief's "inquiry."

"Something has to be done," Mr. Kiley said.

Selectmen Joseph A. DeRosa said the issue is a civil matter between Chief Consentino and Mrs. Childs as both have contacted their own attorneys. Prior to the meeting he also said, "We are going to keep the town right out of it."

Mrs. Childs said she hasn't threatened to sue the town.

But, Mrs. Stewart said she trusts Mrs. Childs and Chief Consentino will be able to "be professional people and they will deal with it."

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