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Former Novi officer gets \$280,000 in ticket quota lawsuit settlement

By Dave Phillips, The Oakland Press

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A former Novi police officer who sued the department over his termination has been awarded a \$280,000 settlement from the Novi Poice Department.

Michael Corbett, a resident of Farmington Hills, filed the suit last year, accusing the department of forcing officers to abide by a mandatory ticket quota. Corbett said his failure to abide by the quota resulted in his early retirement and a dispute over his pension.

“Overall, I’m very happy with the whole situation,” Corbett said.

“I think the point was made. It was beneficial to bring everyone in and depose everybody and get the issue out there.”

The figure was determined by a three-attorney panel during a case evaluation, and both sides agreed to accept the offer rather than go to trial.

Officials with the Novi Police Department declined to comment, directing questions to their attorney, Tom McGraw, who did not return a message seeking comment.

Corbett will receive his pension along with the settlement. He had been working as a security guard before the settlement was reached.

“It was a good job,” he said of the security job.

“Several people needed my hours for their families. Rather than sick around for just a couple of bucks I figured it would be best to spend some time with my family.”

Deborah Gordon, who represented Corbett with assistance from Nick Saleh, said her discovery process revealed evidence showing that a quota was in place.

“The law is very clear — you cannot require a police officer to issue a predetermined number of citations,” Gordon said.

Multiple Novi officers were deposed by Gordon, and many of them said there was a quota in place.

Gordon said the officers were told to make four traffic stops and issue two traffic citations per day.

“It’s a mantra over there,” she said.

“They do view it as a requirement, which would be illegal.”

That requirement evolved over time to also include a commercial vehicle stop and an arrest, Gordon said.

Officers who fell behind on their numbers would be held out of training and forced to work traffic patrol for an entire day in order to catch up.

“What a lot of the guys would tell us is yeah, they’d make their (four) stops, but they are imbued with the sense of using their discretion ... so they would often give warnings (instead of tickets),” Gordon said.

Those officers agreed that it’s sometimes better to let certain people off with a warning, allowing a citizen to drive off with a good feeling about police, Gordon said.

During his deposition, Novi Police Chief David Molloy was asked why he cared about revenue data.

“Because I run a \$17 million business, and it’s important to me,” he said, according to Gordon.

Operating a law enforcement agency as if it were a business can be detrimental to officers and the public, Gordon said.

“Tickets are a part of law enforcement work, obviously, but it’s a part, and everything else is being sacrificed,” she said.

“When you become so obsessed with the revenue side, it’s such a detrainment to the citizens.”

As an example, Gordon said officers would often give tickets for impeding traffic rather than speeding. An impeding traffic ticket does not carry any points.

“Nobody ever gets any points,” Gordon said.

“They admit the whole point system in Michigan is to ultimately pull the bad drivers off the road, but with the Novi system, they ensure they get the revenue out of the driver, but the driver will never reflect points. You could have a dangerous, reckless driver but his license will never be pulled and the Secretary of State will never be contacted.”

Officials, under oath, said that the “four and two” system was not a minimum but rather a “goal.”

“It’s never been an issue,” Molloy said, according to Gordon.

The law was never included in Molloy’s book of directives for his officers.

“What really bothers me is when you call in the highest level people that work for the government, and I’ve had 15 (lower-level officers) in here telling me this is a requirement, and then you have the top level guys come in here like ‘Oh, absolutely not,’” Gordon said.

“It’s very frustrating. These people are on the government dime.”

Gordon said documents used at comparative statistics meetings, which were attended by the entire department as well as firefighters, included charts showing the number of traffic stops in a given time period for each officer. If an officer exceeded 56 stops per month, his or her number was displayed in green. If the number was within 10 percent of that figure, it was in yellow. Those who were more than 10 percent away from the goal had their numbers listed in red.

“They’ve got their story and they’re sticking to it — it’s a goal,” Gordon said.

“Why are you tracking it like this? Why are you putting it in red?”

The charts would be displayed on squadron televisions, and if an officer shut it off, it would later be turned back on, Gordon said.

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