

DETROIT

Detroit police lieutenant claims workplace retaliation in trying to expose overtime scam



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Attorneys for a veteran Detroit police lieutenant filed a whistleblower lawsuit Friday against the department and officials in connection with an alleged overtime scam involving members of a special unit who are friends with one of the assistant chiefs.

Attorneys from Deborah Gordon Law firm in Bloomfield Hills filed a complaint Friday in Detroit U.S. District Court on behalf of Lt. Lori Pierce Friday, citing that she experienced retaliation, harassment and the "creation of a hostile work environment in violation of the Whistleblowers' Protection Act," according to the lawsuit.

Pierce was seeking damages "in whatever amount she is found to be entitled" against the Detroit Police Department, Assistant Police Chief Charles Fitzgerald, Sgt. Scott Barrick and Lt. James Cashion as defendants, court records showed.

Pierce joined the department in September 1993 as an officer and was promoted as lieutenant in October 2000, a role in which she was appointed to oversee the Third Precinct. Pierce, according to the suit, "had access to all officers' time records where officers reported hours worked on the job, including overtime."

She purportedly was notified by an official who submitted payroll records to be processed, that the "Special Operations Unit were intentionally, fraudulently

reporting their time to reflect more hours than were worked," resulting in some officers being paid for hours they did not work, the lawsuit said.

The fraudulent reporting was described in the lawsuit as a "pattern and practice condoned by" Cashion and Barrick, who were among leadership at the precinct.

Cashion and Barrick were said to be friends with the Fitzgerald, whose son reports to them in the special operations unit, according to the lawsuit.

"Both officers were some of the worst offenders in fraudulent reporting, including claiming they were working when going to the gym and golfing," which resulted in the alleged "windfall of tens of thousands of dollars," the lawsuit alleged.

John Roach, a spokesman for Mayor Mike Duggan's office, said late Friday he was not aware of the lawsuit and had no immediate comment.

According to the litigation, Pierce reported the time card fraud to the leadership of DPD's Internal Affairs unit between September and December 2022 and included video footage of officers entering and exiting the department, activity logs and GPS locations to prove the officers' time cards were fudged.

The department began an investigation into the time card fraud and Pierce prepared a report to present to Police Chief James White, according to her attorney.

The lawsuit alleges Pierce sent the report to a former lieutenant to get advice on how to present to the chief, but word of the report had "quickly got back to members of the department," including Fitzgerald, on the overtime allegations against Cashion and Barrick.

In March 2023, one officer in the Special Operations Unit, Roger Craft, filed a complaint against Pierce claiming her inquiries about work hours among officers had created a "hostile work environment," according to Pierce's lawsuit.

Pierce's suit says she was suspended for two days following Craft's complaint, the first time she had been disciplined in more than 30 years as a Detroit police officer.

Then, on Dec. 13, DPD suspended Pierce for 30 days "as a result of the investigation into reporting of time fraud," the lawsuit says.

The two suspensions, the lawsuit claims, "have tarnished (Pierce's) reputation and will remain in her disciplinary history, which prior to her reporting of fraud and theft, was unblemished."

Pierce's attorneys argued that she was discriminated against with the "compensation, terms, conditions, location, and/or privileges of her employment because she reported a violation or a suspected violation of a law or regulation or rule promulgated pursuant to law."

The federal lawsuit said Cashion and Barrick were suspended for three days due to their connection to the assistant chief and that other officers were investigated for similar conduct and criminally charged and/or fired.

Pierce's attorneys couldn't immediately be reached for further comment Friday night.

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