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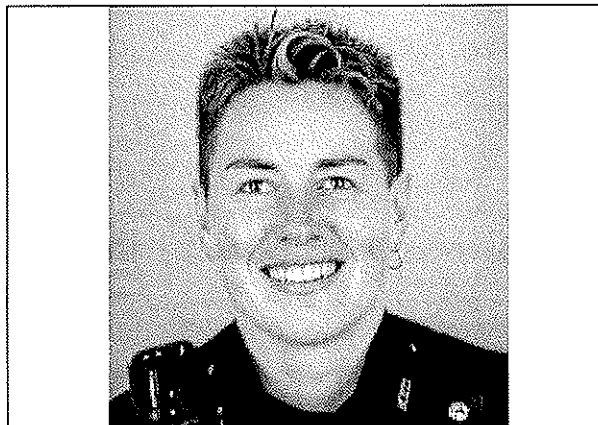
Madison police officer resigns under cloud, will get 8 months' pay

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A veteran officer assigned to the Dane County Narcotics and Gang Task Force has resigned from the Madison Police Department after an 18-month investigation cleared her of illegal activity but found several policy violations that included "overbearing, oppressive or tyrannical conduct."

Denise Markham, 46, who has been on paid leave since June 2009, resigned on Dec. 31 but will continue on the city's payroll until Sept. 6, when her sick days, vacation and comp time runs out, Police Chief Noble Wray said.

Keeping Markham on the payroll for eight months after her resignation will cost the city \$44,415, according to the city comptroller's office, including payment for vacation and sick days she accrued while on paid leave.



Wray, who released a brief summary of findings from the 18-month investigation Friday, said Markham's resignation was part of a negotiated settlement. Given contract provisions and the additional expense and time it could take if Markham appealed to the Police and Fire Commission, "this is really the best deal for all parties involved." Wray said.

Investigators found numerous incidents that revealed a pattern of policy violations over Markham's 4½ years with the task force, Wray said. Wray on Friday declined to release details of those incidents; a request by the Wisconsin State Journal under the state's open records law to view the entire investigative report is pending.

Broadly, investigators found Markham:

- Filed incomplete or inaccurate reports
- Conducted improper searches
- Conducted improper seizures of private property
- Improperly handled controlled substances
- Engaged in "overbearing, oppressive or tyrannical conduct."

"This is a unique case," Wray said. "Generally, we look at officers involved in single incidents or a few violations. What's unique about this case is that it is really a review of the work she'd done."

Andrew Schauer, who represents Markham as an attorney for the Wisconsin Professional Police Association, said she'd been singled out for minor policy infractions. Of all the police reports reviewed during Markham's assignment to the task force, investigators found only one case in which a supervisor questioned the way she handled property, he said.

Markham, a 22-year veteran of the department, agreed to resign rather than fight the allegations, primarily because of "personal family medical issues," Schauer said. Markham declined to be interviewed, he said.

Markham earned the vacation and sick leave she's taking through Sept. 6, Schauer said. "The department took 18 months to investigate," Schauer said. "That doesn't mean she was on some 18-month vacation. Being on suspension is not a vacation."

Markham will be able to collect all the money the city put into her pension fund during the 22 years she worked for the police department. And she has a right to her unused leave, he said. "It's contractual," Wray said. "I understand how this may look from a taxpayer's standpoint, but my hands are really tied as to what the process allows me to do for termination."

Markham made \$33.84 an hour, for an annual salary of \$65,988, excluding overtime, said Pat Skaleski, payroll accountant in the city comptroller's office.

She has 977.5 hours of sick leave banked, Skaleski said, having earned half a day of sick leave each pay period, including the time she's been on paid leave. She also has about three weeks of vacation and 38 hours of comp time that was carried over since 2007, Skaleski said.

Editor's note: This story corrects an earlier version that said that Markham would not be able to collect money in her pension fund because she was not fully vested.