



LOUISIANA LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR
DARYL G. PURPERA, CPA, CFE

March 17, 2014

TOWN OF AMITE CITY

Amite City Chief of Police Jerry Trabona authorized 25 off-duty police officers to receive witness fees totaling \$18,000 between April 2012 and October 2013 for appearing at arraignments, even though the officers never showed up in court, according to an investigative audit released Monday by Legislative Auditor Daryl Purpera.

The report said that Trabona authorized payments for 360 court appearances for which officers were not present in court. In doing so, the report said, the police chief of the Tangipahoa Parish town may have violated state law governing witness fees for police officers and filing false public records. Off-duty police officers are entitled to a \$50 witness fee for each case in which they have to testify in court, up to \$150 a day if called to testify in three or more cases.

The allegations of the possible violations of state law came to light during a routine financial audit. A sample of payroll and court records found that Trabona “instructed the town clerk to pay officers for court appearances when the officers did not appear in court.”

According to the report, Trabona told the state auditor’s office that after city court for the town holds arraignments for defendants, he gets a copy of the docket and finds out which defendants pleaded guilty to a moving violation ticket.

For each guilty plea, Trabona notes the name of the officer who issued the ticket, “totals all guilty pleas and submits his notation to his staff to be entered on the ‘court paid’ column of the officers’ timesheet,” the report said. Trabona approves the time sheets at the end of the pay period and submits it to the town clerk for payroll processing.

Trabona told auditors that police officers only receive the fees if they are off duty at the time of the arraignment, but city court officials said the officers are not present at the arraignment and would not be needed as witnesses at that time.

The report said that Trabona told auditors that a few years ago, the arraignment - the point at which a defendant enters a plea - was held immediately before the trial and the officers had to be present at that time. “Since then, the trial is separate from the arraignment; however he (the police chief) did not change his process and continued to pay the officers from the arraignment docket despite the officers not appearing in court,” the report said.



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It said that Trabona “appears to have understood state law governing the payment of witness fees and materially misrepresented police officers’ time sheets.”

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On Twitter: Amite Chief of Police authorized officers to receive witness fees without showing up to court.