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Feuding police deserve a time-out after 'belly bump'

The relationship between Gloucester police Chief John Beaudette and his subordinates has now gone beyond the "Can't we all just get along?" stage. It is now at the "Can't we all just grow up?" stage.

The department has, sadly, been good for embarrassing headlines due to various dysfunctions involving everything from suspensions and grievances to bitter letters to the editor of this newspaper.

And now comes the "belly bump."

A police union attorney sent a letter to Mayor John Bell last week, accusing the chief of "physically" bumping the department's senior lieutenant, Jerris Cook, in an Aug. 31 confrontation over patrolmen assignments.

According to the letter, when Lt. Cook asked the chief, "Are you bumping me?" Beaudette responded, "I just have a big belly."

The letter suggests that the confrontation was in retaliation for union grievances filed against Beaudette and that, besides the union response, Cook may consult a private lawyer about his legal options.

Gloucester residents might well wonder: Don't these people have a city to protect?

While the mission of the department is to promote and provide public safety, its members are busy hiring lawyers, filing grievances and airing petty gripes. They can't even have an argument over policy or scheduling without it resulting in threats of litigation. When kids do this sort of thing, they get sent to their room for a "time-out."

This is emblematic of the lack of professionalism and bad blood between the union and the administration that has plagued the department for far too long.

And it is long past time for it to end.

The union, the chief and the mayor should realize that when things degenerate to this level, nobody wins. They all lose. They all become an embarrassment to the city.

Bell will no longer be in office in a few months. But those who seek to be mayor should make it one of their top priorities to fix this mess. They should present to the voters what they intend to do, if they are elected, to end the in-fighting.

This continued unrest is, obviously, a major distraction from the mission of a police department.

Police officers are supposed to be fighting crime, not one another.