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State: Police need to maintain better records; Complaint part of department feud

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The secretary of the commonwealth issued what amounted to a slap on the wrist this month over the Gloucester Police Department's record keeping, following a complaint by the local patrolmen's union.

To back claims of favoritism in the department, the Gloucester Police Patrolmen's Association has been investigating the distribution of compensation time, which is time off given in lieu of overtime.

As with overtime, compensation time would be given at a rate of time and a half - four hours worked above a normal work week could be given as six hours of pay, or six hours of compensation time, to be used at the employee's discretion with a supervisor's permission.

Police Chief John Beaudette denied that he gives perks to only a few members of the department.

Beaudette disputed that claim, saying that while he has a circle of advisers among the superior officers, who are sergeants and lieutenants, he does not treat department employees differently.

"I know what it's like being on the out," Beaudette said. "I surrounded myself with the best people who I thought would help me run the department."

He said he brought two of his competitors for the chief's job in 2003, Lt. Joseph Aiello and Lt. Michael Lane, into a circle of advisers, along with Lt. Kathleen Auld, as administrative and operations managers in the department.

Patrolman Michael Williams Jr., secretary of the patrolmen's union and a spokesman for the group, said in a statement to the Times that "favoritism is at an all-time high" in the department.

"It appears his friends have been showered with unlimited overtime, questionable assignments and for his very special friends, no-show jobs," Williams said. "This practice has resulted in low morale throughout the entire Police Department."

Beaudette denied those accusations. He said he rarely denies anyone time off when he requests it. Overtime shifts are governed by the rules of the contract and road details are usually distributed by the shift's watch commander, rather than the chief himself.

The union became frustrated with the pace at which information was released and later, with the records themselves. They said the records were incomplete because they only went back to 2002, when they should have stretched to 1998.

In an e-mail to the Times in March, the city's personnel director, Donna Leete, said that "it appears that information may be missing for Police Department employees who have departed" since 2000. She said she also requested that "information be supplied regarding those individuals, as well as records for the years 1999 and 2000."

Williams filed a complaint in March on behalf of the union with Alan Cote, the supervisor of records in the office of Secretary of the Commonwealth - more commonly known as Secretary of State - William Galvin. Cote responded to Williams and Beaudette on May 7, citing a letter from Auld acknowledging "that there is a folder missing which is believed to contain pages from the day watch from the year 1999 to June 27, 2002."

Cote said in his letter that the inability "to account for all the documents in its custody and control remains an issue of concern regarding the department's records security and management procedures."

No action was ordered from the secretary of the commonwealth's office.