

Politics

N.J. State Police lieutenant allegedly helped civilian collect pay while skipping work

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State Police patrol car.JPG

A State Police lieutenant faces disciplinary charges for colluding with another officer to allow a civilian employee to get paid for skipping work, and for falsifying his own payroll, according to a court document.

(Star-Ledger file photo)

TRENTON — A State Police lieutenant faces disciplinary charges for allegedly colluding with another officer to lie about a female civilian employee's whereabouts so she could collect pay on days she did not work, The Star-Ledger has learned.

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The lieutenant, Michael Zimmerman, has also admitted to falsifying his own payroll records to show he worked eight hours in June 2011 when in fact he was on vacation, according to the charges filed with the Office of Administrative Law.

Zimmerman has not been suspended or charged criminally. State Police rules prevent him from commenting on the charges.

Investigators said Zimmerman e-mailed the unidentified civilian employee a "cover story" stating that he needed her to work on a project. He told her in the e-mail he would send the story to her supervisor any time she wanted to skip work, the charges state.

Zimmerman then wrote a second, similar e-mail and sent it to a fellow commanding officer — his alleged partner in the scheme, also not named. In the e-mail he said he needed the civilian employee's help, according to the court document. The second officer sent it along to the woman's supervisor.

"By his own admission, Lt. Zimmerman acknowledged authoring the electronic correspondence in collusion with the other commissioned officer with the intent to afford the civilian employee with unauthorized, paid leave," the document said.

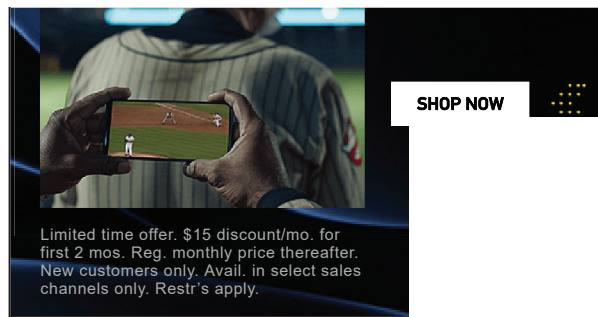
Internal investigators also said Zimmerman, on June 21, 2011, and June 23, 2011, failed to properly supervise the civilian employee when she was temporarily placed under his supervision, allowing her to collect pay for not working.

On those same two dates, according to the charges, Zimmerman lied in the State Police's daily payroll tracking system by indicating he worked four hours each day when in fact he was on vacation and had not come to work.

The charges state Zimmerman admitted to falsifying the records during an interview with internal investigators.

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Zimmerman, a 19-year veteran who works under Lt. Col. Edward Cetnar in the Office of the Deputy Superintendent of Operations, earned \$138,074 in salary and other pay, excluding overtime, in 2012, state payroll records show.

A spokesman for the State Police, Lt. Stephen Jones, confirmed Zimmerman has not been suspended and said troopers' entries into the payroll system are tracked and verified by administrative officers in each command section.

Disciplinary charges against troopers take a winding path.

The State Police's internal affairs unit investigates troopers suspected of breaking the force's rules and regulations, or state law.

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Findings are then sent to the state Attorney General's Office, which decides whether to pursue criminal charges.

But the office can decline to prosecute troopers and does not have to explain why publicly.

Once the attorney general decides not to prosecute and returns a case to State Police, a trooper's admission during any subsequent investigation cannot be used as the basis for criminal charges.

Troopers can, however, still be punished by suspension or termination, and their lifetime pensions can be reduced.

A spokesman for the Attorney General's Office, Paul Lorient, declined to comment on why prosecutors passed on Zimmerman's alleged offenses but said the office "fully evaluated the file and the facts of the case."

A hearing on Zimmerman's charges is scheduled for Feb. 3, before an administrative law judge.

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- None of the above

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