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News

# N.J. state trooper suspended without pay for a year after she was caught drinking, driving three times

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By Chris Megerian/Statehouse Bureau



**Star-Ledger file photos**

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Judge has recommended a seven-month suspension for New Jersey State Police Trooper Sheila McKaig, who was caught drinking and driving but did not get a ticket.

HAMILTON TOWNSHIP (Atlantic County) — State Police Trooper Sheila McKaig, who was caught drinking and driving three times without getting a ticket, has been suspended without pay for a year.

Her suspension, ordered by Supt. Rick Fuentes, is tougher than the seven-month suspension recommended by an administrative law judge.

"He believed this was warranted given the facts of the case," said Sgt. Stephen Jones, a State Police spokesman.

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McKaig, who patrolled the Atlantic City Expressway, began the suspension on Monday, Jones said.

A lawyer for McKaig, a trooper for almost 10 years, did not return a call requesting comment. Troopers can appeal disciplinary decisions in state court.

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McKaig was pulled over by local police three times in three months in 2008 in Atlantic County's Hamilton Township. Police suspected she was under the influence but never tested her blood-alcohol level, arrested her or issued any tickets, according to a report issued by Administrative Law Judge Ronald Reba in April.

At the third stop, McKaig identified herself as a trooper and admitted she had drank "a lot." The Hamilton officer who pulled her over drove her to the police station, where troopers picked her up, the report said.

The case resulted in a wider internal probe when it was revealed that McKaig's superiors did not pursue disciplinary charges against her after they were informed she was pulled over. It was only after an anonymous letter charging a cover-up circulated at State Police headquarters that McKaig faced disciplinary charges of conduct unbecoming an officer, Reba's report said.

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McKaig's motor vehicle stops occurred during what Fuentes called a "disturbing spike" in alcohol-related incidents from 2007 through 2009. He said stricter policies were put in place in January 2010, leading to a sharp drop in cases involving drinking that year.

Reba wrote in his report that McKaig did not need to be fired because she is considered a "model trooper" and sought counseling.

"Apart from a six-day suspension in 2006 because of a domestic issue in which alcohol was a factor, respondent essentially has an unblemished disciplinary record during her career," he wrote.

McKaig was commended for helping save the life of a 4-year-old girl after a car accident in 2005, then recognized in 2008 for helping disarm a man with two

MAY 14, 2010

## **DWI News: New Jersey State Police Trooper Gets Multiple Passes for Driving Under the Influence**

by **Jonathan F. Marshall**

Being arrested, much less convicted, of drunken driving can adversely impact an individual's personal and work life. In fact, careers have been ended by DWI convictions. This just one of many pitfalls as a result of being arrested for DWI or drug DUI here in the Garden State. As a New Jersey drunk driving defense lawyer, I know what happens to motorists arrested and charged with driving while under the influence of alcohol.

Having worked as a municipal prosecutor in years past, I am particularly sensitive when I read that a law enforcement officer has apparently taken advantage of their position to avoid punishment for an alleged crime. It's a sad fact that many times police officers who enforce drunken driving laws will themselves get a "pass" from other officers if stopped for driving while intoxicated.

According to a recent news article, State Police Trooper Sheila McKaig was reportedly stopped 10 times for various offenses including DWI over a period of 14 months, yet she never received a citation in New Jersey for any of those incidents. The most recent one occurred in Atlantic City in 2008 when McKaig was let go after she was pulled over by another officer on suspicion of DWI.

Based on news reports, Police officer Ronald Gorneau spotted McKaig's Toyota swerving and pulled it over. According to the police incident report, McKaig admitted she drank "a lot" before getting behind the wheel. However, after being taken to the Hamilton Township police station in Mays Landing, when was released without charges and taken home by fellow troopers.

New articles indicate that this latest incident was not out of the ordinary. McKaig's Atlantic City stop was the third time in three months during early 2008 that McKaig was stopped while off duty by Hamilton police. Because of so-called professional courtesy, in each of those instances no blood-alcohol content (BAC) test was administered to McKaig, no charges were filed and no tickets were written.

Professional courtesy is attributed to instances where police officers give fellow cops a pass that they would not normally give to the average motorist. The irony is that during this same time that officer McKaig has been given multiple passes after DWI stops, the state of New Jersey and local law enforcement agencies have had a sustained crackdown on drunken driving.

According to news reports, state police officials have stated that the 41-year-old McKaig is a highly respected and decorated trooper who has earned her spot patrolling the Atlantic City Expressway by staying sober the past two years. Although she caught a break from Hamilton police, they said, she used the opportunity to turn her life around. All that can be said here is that very few ordinary New Jersey drivers would have been so lucky as officer McKaig.

**Special treatment for trooper in DWI stops**, TheDailyJournal.com, April 26, 2010

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