

Officer loses money over ID

Thursday, March 16, 2006

By **TERRENCE DOPP**

Trenton Bureau

TRENTON -- A South Jersey probation officer is fighting charges he allegedly improperly worked with law enforcement officers to catch a Salem County man who owed \$13,000 in back child support payments, the Sunbeam has learned.

Jeff Burdsall, who tracks probationers in the vicinage serving Gloucester, Salem and Cumberland counties, was suspended for two days without pay for not following an "unwritten code," union officials said.

According to the Administrative Office of the Courts, Burdsall has been in his post since September 2002.

Burdsall is accused of accompanying a Salem County Sheriff's Department officer on an arrest on Feb. 4, 2005 in order to identify the suspect, who was also under his probationary supervision, according to a union head.

While no formal code prohibits the practice, Burdsall's managers argued it compromised the probation division's impartiality. He lost separate grievance hearings in December and on Feb. 8.

The union argued other probation officers in New Jersey counties cooperate with law enforcement. Further, they argue because Burdsall clocked out on an approved break he was under no requirement to tell his supervisors where he planned to go.

"It's something you just do and think it's the right thing to do," said George P. Christie, president of the Probation Association of New Jersey, the union representing Burdsall.

Christie said the suspension violated Burdsall's "just cause" rights under officers' contract. That caveat forbids the state from sanctioning workers with no justification.

The AOC "didn't prove this guy did anything wrong. To this day, they still don't have any policy on what he did," Christie added.

Attempts to contact Burdsall through the union were unsuccessful.

Tamara Kendig, a spokeswoman for the courts, said because the matter is an unresolved disciplinary matter she was contractually precluded from discussing it.

According to a brief filed by the union, Burdsall supervised a man \$13,000 in arrears in child and spousal support. The person, who union heads and AOC officials did not identify, was issued an arrest warrant for failing to appear in court to answer the charges.

On Feb. 4, 2005, a sheriff's officer allegedly approached Burdsall at his Salem office to accompany him to a city gas station to identify the man.

According to the documents, Burdsall clocked out on a 15 minute break and went with the officer. At the arrest scene, he did not participate and walked back to his office with four minutes until his break ended.

One other charge originally leveled against the probation officer of insubordination was later dropped.

© 2006 Today's Sunbeam

© 2006 NJ.com All Rights Reserved.