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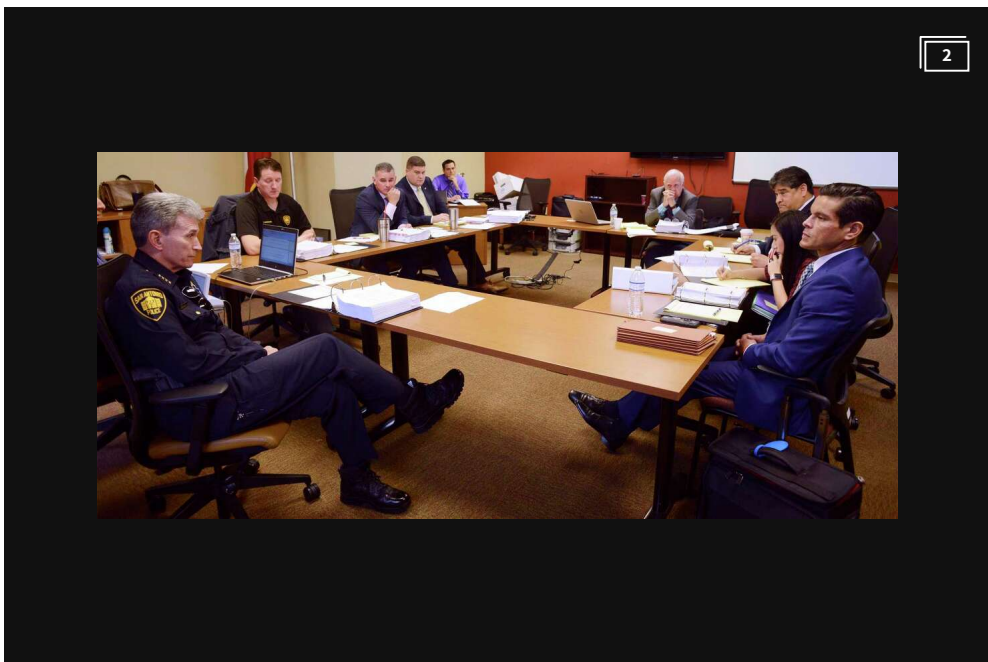
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NEWS // POLITICS

San Antonio's feces sandwich cop Matthew Luckhurst fired from Floresville reserve squad

Texas Sunset Advisory Commission cited officer's new job as evidence that state's police accountability system is broken.


Eric Dexheimer, Austin Bureau
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Matthew Luckhurst, right, fired from the SAPD for allegedly providing a feces sandwich to a homeless man, faces Police Chief William McManus, left, during a hearing before an arbitrator in 2018. A reader is critical of such processes with police unions.

Billy Calzada /Staff file photo

A police officer fired from the San Antonio Police Department for two feces-related incidents but then hired by a small department just outside the city has now been released from that agency, too, after Hearst Newspapers reported on his new job.

IN-DEPTH: Matthew Luckhurst's job as reserve officer illustrates broken accountability system

The Floresville Police Department released Matthew Luckhurst from his reserve officer status this week, said Mayor Cissy Gonzalez-Dippel. She said the city is also reviewing its hiring policies to prevent another embarrassing episode.

“I want to let the citizens know that we are looking into this,” she said. “I apologize; the city was not aware. This isn’t anything I’m proud of. It’s a black eye for the City of Floresville.”

Gonzalez-Dippel said her phone and email had been bombarded with angry messages after the news coverage. “It hasn’t been a pleasant week,” she said.

San Antonio fired Luckhurst in 2016 after the then-bicycle cop gave a homeless man a sandwich with dog feces in it. But the decision was overturned by an arbitrator because the city had missed a deadline to take disciplinary action.

Luckhurst was fired a second time after he and another officer left a toilet in a women’s bathroom unflushed after using it and then spread “a brown substance with the consistency of tapioca” on the seat. Luckhurst appealed that, too, but in 2020 an arbitrator upheld the decision.

Five months after his firing, however, the Floresville Police Department hired Luckhurst as a reserve officer. In a report released last month, the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission cited his ability to find new work as a police officer despite his tarnished record as evidence that the state’s system of holding bad police accountable for their actions was broken.

Unlike other occupational regulatory agencies — for doctors, plumbers and nurses — that can take action against licensees for bad behavior, the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement licenses police but has no authority to discipline officers for unprofessional conduct. Instead, oversight is left up to each individual agency, which sets its own policies and standards.

Not only do standards often differ, but the state’s efforts to tag bad cops have been ineffective, the Sunset commission found.

State law requires police chiefs to assign a departing officer’s status as honorable, general or dishonorable to give hiring departments an idea of what they’re getting. The Texas Commission on Law Enforcement also can revoke the license of an officer who accumulates two dishonorable discharges.

Yet the appeals process, in which departments must defend their decisions in administrative court, can be expensive and time consuming, and many understaffed and underfunded police agencies shy away or back down from a bad conduct discharge. While Texas police agencies have issued 2,621 dishonorable discharges over the past five years, only 14 officers have had their licenses revoked during the same period for compiling two of them.

That allows officers with a record of misbehavior to keep working. Since 2012 about 1,400 dishonorably discharged police found new law enforcement work, according to the nonprofit Texas 2036 Project. “The state’s regulation of law enforcement personnel and agencies is, by and large, toothless,” concluded the Sunset Commission, which reviews the performance of state agencies every decade.

State records show Floresville hired Luckhurst as a reserve officer in November 2020, five months after he’d been fired from San Antonio. Gonzalez-Dippel said city officials outside the police department were unaware that he’d joined the small force in the city 30 miles southeast of San Antonio.

“We leave it to the police chief, and we hadn’t heard about it,” she said. Chief Lorenzo Herrera did not return messages.

Different departments use their reserve officers in different ways. Although the position often is unpaid, police typically join the reserve ranks to keep their state licenses current, which allows them to be hired for private security jobs.

Gonzalez-Dippel said Floresville reserve officers typically provide security at municipal court proceedings, city council meetings and community center events. She said that while she had followed news coverage of Luckhurst's behavior in San Antonio, she didn't recognize him out of context in his new capacity in Floresville.



On Monday, she asked City Manager Andy Joslin to revise city hiring procedures. Now, new police candidates will have to be vetted by the city's human resources department as well as the police department. She said the city will also review its reserve police office program to see if other reforms are needed.

"This has brought about big changes here," she said.

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