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Bellingham police chief fires detective accused of misusing department's dry cleaning perk

BY DENVER PRATT

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BELLINGHAM POLICE DEPARTMENT *Courtesy to The Bellingham Herald*

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A Bellingham Police detective under criminal investigation for allegedly misappropriating and misusing public funds by using another officer's dry cleaning stipend has been fired from the department.

Detective Adam (Bo) S. McGinty was terminated on Friday, Aug. 18, effective immediately, according to an email from Bellingham Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig.

McGinty had been the lead detective investigating three school administrators [for their alleged failures to report](#) the sexual assaults of a female high school student. They are scheduled to stand trial on the misdemeanor charges beginning Aug. 28.

"Based on the evidence presented to me and Detective McGinty's statement, I have terminated his employment with the Bellingham Police Department," Mertzig said in the email sent late Friday to The Bellingham Herald.

"Our community expects their law enforcement professionals to be honest, to do the right thing, and maintain a high level of integrity both on and off duty. The investigation showed Det. McGinty used another detective's name to acquire dry cleaning services to which he was not entitled, at the City's expense," Mertzig's statement said. "While the facts of the case are about the fraudulent use of dry cleaning, the core of this investigation is about integrity."

McGinty, who was part of the special victims unit, had been with the department since March 1, 2015. He was promoted to detective in January 2018 and was previously Bellingham Public Schools' district resource officer.

“When my office learned this was occurring, we immediately took action and began an internal investigation. As Chief, I will continue to uphold the highest standards of integrity and hold the members of my department accountable. Detective McGinty’s actions do not reflect the values of the Bellingham Police Department,” Mertzig said in her statement.

INVESTIGATIONS UNDERWAY

The Bellingham Police Department [began its internal affairs investigation into McGinty](#) on May 18. He was placed on paid administrative leave June 7 in accordance with agency policy, The Herald previously reported.

The internal administrative investigation was completed July 21. Bellingham Police Deputy Chief Don Almer submitted his report on the investigation, including discipline recommendations, to the chief five days later.

The report concluded that “the investigation was conducted thoroughly, fairly, and in accordance with laws and policies,” Almer previously told The Herald.

The discipline recommended for McGinty was termination, Almer said Friday evening in an email.

The investigation also determined McGinty had violated department policies, but Almer declined to specify which policies, due to the ongoing criminal investigation.

The Mount Vernon Police Department began conducting a criminal investigation into McGinty’s alleged actions on June 15.

The department began its investigation at the request of Bellingham police after it “appeared a policy violation may result in criminal implications,” Mount Vernon police Lt. Mike Moore previously told The Herald.

As of Friday, Aug. 18, the criminal investigation into McGinty was ongoing, no arrests had been made and no charges had been filed against McGinty, Moore said.

LANDING ON THE ‘BRADY’ LIST

Because of McGinty's alleged actions, the Whatcom County Prosecuting Attorney's Office placed McGinty on a dishonest officers list in late July.

The [prosecutor's office's review of the internal affairs investigation concluded McGinty "demonstrated dishonesty" by using another detective's name](#) to obtain additional dry cleaning services.

The administrative investigation ultimately determined that McGinty allegedly violated state theft laws, "that he misappropriated or misused public funds and that he engaged in conduct that was criminal, dishonest or disgraceful," according to a July 21 letter from the county prosecutor's office sent out to Whatcom County attorneys and obtained by The Herald.

The letter sent from the prosecutor's office was a notification that McGinty had been placed on [the "Brady" list](#).

The "Brady" list, maintained by the prosecutor's office, is a list of law enforcement officers whose credibility has been called into question. The officers [on the list](#) have most commonly been found to have been dishonest, lied while in an official capacity, or have been accused or found guilty of past misconduct.

Prosecutors are legally required to turn the list over to defense attorneys if an officer on the "Brady" list is involved or worked on a case. This information [can then be used to impeach](#) the officer as a witness if they are called to testify in court.

The Whatcom prosecutor's office determined that if a reasonable person, like a judge or juror, heard certain information related to McGinty, they could conclude that McGinty "demonstrated dishonesty by violating Bellingham Police standards of conduct that include theft of services by aid of deception," the impeachment disclosure letter states.



Former Bellingham Police Chief David Doll (left) congratulates Detective Adam (Bo) S. McGinty (right) on his promotion in a Jan. 3, 2018 photo. In June 2023, McGinty became the subject of a department internal affairs investigation and an outside agency criminal investigation. McGinty was fired in mid-August 2023 from the department. Bellingham Police Department *Courtesy to The Bellingham Herald*

Under Bellingham Police Department's collective bargaining agreement with union employees, each law enforcement officer is allotted dry cleaning costs equivalent to the cost of cleaning one uniform per week.

Accounting noticed that two detectives were using dry cleaning services far greater than the allotted amount.

Bellingham police administration contacted McGinty and another detective for using excessive amounts of dry cleaning, according to the letter.

“The other detective expressed surprise saying that he hadn’t used dry cleaning in three years. Detective McGinty told the administration that the other detective had nothing to do with these issues,” the letter states.

“It was determined that Detective McGinty had used another detective’s name to obtain additional dry cleaning services.”

The findings from the internal affairs investigation determined McGinty violated three standards of conduct governing Bellingham Police Department employees, according to the letter. However, the policy that contains the three standards of conduct McGinty is accused of violating is not one of the [publicly available, listed policies for the police department](#) on the city of Bellingham’s website.

When asked last week and again on Friday when accounting first noticed the discrepancies in the detectives’ dry cleaning services, how long McGinty’s alleged theft of services has been occurring and how much money McGinty is alleged to have misused, Almer, the deputy chief, said he could not provide those details because the criminal investigation is ongoing.

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DENVER PRATT



360-715-2236

Reporter Denver Pratt joined The Bellingham Herald in 2017 and covers courts and criminal and social justice. She has worked in Montana, Florida and Virginia.

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