

Police deputy earning \$309G



POLITICS & POWER

Rick Brand

rick.brand@newsday.com

Suffolk County Police Commissioner Geraldine Hart brought in a trusted colleague from her days as special agent in charge of the FBI's Long Island office in making James Skopek her first deputy commissioner last June.

Now, Hart has won approval from the state Civil Service Commission for a waiver, making the former Nassau detective sergeant Suffolk's latest double-dipper with salary and pension totaling \$309,460 a year.

Under state law, those under age 65 who are collecting a state pension are normally limited to making no more than \$30,000 a year if they go back to work as an employee of state or local government.

Such waivers may only be



JOHN ROCA

James Skopek

granted when there is "an urgent need . . . as a result of an unplanned, unpredictable and unexpected vacancy where sufficient time is not available to recruit a qualified individual," the law states. State law limits waivers to two years, though they can be renewed.

With the waiver, Skopek, 60, who retired in 2016, is now collecting a county salary of

\$157,300 on top of an annual pension of \$152,160. That pension comes after 30 years' service, the bulk of it with the Nassau County police but also 15 months as a New York City officer.

While Skopek's base salary at retirement was \$155,585, in his last full year on the force, he earned \$244,998, with overtime. When he departed from Nassau, he also received \$361,554 for unused vacation and sick time as well as deferred overtime and holiday pay.

Skopek's waiver came to light after Suffolk recently suffered a credit rating downgrade from Moody's Investors Service. State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli last month also rated county finances as suffering from "significant fiscal stress."

Hart's move is not without precedent.

Her predecessor Timothy Sini, now Suffolk County district attorney, brought in former federal investigator John

Barry, whom he knew from his days as a federal prosecutor, as his first deputy in 2016. Barry, now Sini's chief district attorney investigator, got a waiver so he could legally collect \$237,000 a year in pay and his pension from his time with the NYPD.

In 2012, Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone brought back Fred Pollert, former deputy county executive for finance, who needed a waiver to make \$308,000 in pay and pension.

Suffolk officials say the county saves money because there's no further payments for Skopek's pension or health benefits.

Skopek declined to comment.

Hart said she recruited Skopek, who worked as a private security director after retiring, because she had worked closely with him as a supervisor on the Long Island anti-gang task force. She also noted his "great reputation" for his work with a federal anti-terrorism task force.

Also, Skopek had no local political ties. Such connections helped lead to the rise of James Burke as Suffolk's top uniformed police officer. Burke is in federal prison after pleading guilty in February 2016 to obstruction of justice and violating Christopher Loeb's civil rights.

"Without a doubt, you want to have someone you can count on and trust and have known for many years and someone you know will fit into the team," Hart said. "He's a great candidate coming from the federal side of the house but someone who had a local perspective" from his years in the Nassau police.

Suffolk Legis. Robert Trotta (R-Fort Salonga), a former Suffolk detective who worked with Skopek on the FBI anti-gang task force, called Skopek "very competent and extremely hard-working."

But Skopek's "compensation . . . is the product of a broken system," Trotta said.

"It brings great hope...It is truly A TOUCH of HEAVEN."

—Daniel Herman, former Minister of Culture of the Czech Republic

"I felt like I was in heaven."

If people watch this production, their inner souls will be purified. This really is a performance for the very fortunate.

—Choi Yun Xi, Korean President's Award-winning artist

"Awe-Inspiring!" —ABC

"A must-see!" —Broadway World

JAN 10-20 LINCOLN CENTER ShenYun.com/NY | Early Bird by 11/20
MAR 6-17 David H. Koch Theater | 888.907.4697 | Code: **Early19**

MAR 20-24 SUNY Purchase • MAR 29-31 Stamford, CT • APR 26-MAY 4 Newark, NJ