

Nassau detective shortage

More are finding the promotion doesn't pay off

BY CELESTE HADRICK
celeste.hadrick@newsday.com

Nassau police detectives are turning in their gold shields and returning to patrol because there is little financial incentive for them to continue working long hours under high-stress conditions, police and union officials testified Tuesday.

Seven detectives returned their shields in the past year and another request is pending from a detective to drop back to police officer status, Nassau

Detectives Association President John Wighaus told the county legislature's public safety committee at a hearing into the county's growing detective shortage.

Nassau has 309 detectives, short of the 360 budgeted, Wighaus said.

He predicted retirements over the next few months would reduce the number of detectives to fewer than 300 — as detectives deal with 2,400 identified gang members; investigate 1,700 persons reported missing every year; battle illegal opioids; and probe financial fraud cases against the elderly that have increased by 47 percent this year.

By comparison, 20 years ago the county had 460 police de-

tectives, and a decade ago there were 425, said Wighaus.

He cited a growing lack of interest among police officers in becoming detectives.

"A designation once thought of as a pinnacle of a police career is now a pariah to most officers in Nassau County," Wighaus said.

He said a common refrain is, "it's just not worth it. Being a detective is so much responsibility. It is a 24-hour-a day job and there's no financial incentive to take on this additional work and stress."

Said police Commissioner Patrick Ryder, "You take on more responsibility, more work and we're going to give you less money."

Wighaus and Ryder said past

union contracts resulted in pay steps that essentially drop detective earnings below police officer salaries for a period of years.

Wighaus said newly designated detectives must remain in the Police Benevolent Association's negotiated salary step plan until they've completed it, and then go through a separate detective step plan.

A 2016 memorandum of agreement says detectives will get no salary step increases until they've completed the 75-month detective step program.

"It doesn't make any sense, to go through steps for five years to get back to where I was," Ryder said.

Neither Wighaus nor Ryder gave salary figures. But a report this year by the legislature's of-

fice of budget review showed average detective earnings in 2018, including overtime, were \$153,705, compared with \$187,503 in 2013.

The administration of County Executive Laura Curran has said detective pay will be addressed in contract negotiations that are underway. All county union contracts expired at the end of 2017.

Ryder said he could approve more overtime to help alleviate the detective shortage, but said most detectives already are overworked.

"Paying overtime doesn't give you better service. When your staffing level is down, you've got to deal with what you've got ... You're pulling from the same pool," he said.

TWO TROUBLED LI NURSING HOMES

Newsday Staff and Wire Reports

The federal government has for years kept under wraps the names of hundreds of nursing homes around the country found by inspectors to have serious health, safety or sanitary problems.

Nearly 400 facilities nationwide, including two on Long Island, had a "persistent record of poor care" as of April, but they were not included along with a shorter list of homes that get increased federal scrutiny and do have warning labels, according to a Senate report released Monday.

The two on Long Island are Medford Multicare Center in Medford, which previously ran afoul of regulators, and Townhouse Center for Rehabilitation & Nursing in Uniondale, which is listed as a candidate for the special federal program.

However, the monitor the state attorney general appointed for Medford, which years ago agreed to reforms as part of a \$28 million settlement, provided a copy of a March 13 letter from the state Department of Health saying the federal agency had removed it from the list because it

"has achieved and sustained progress in survey results."

Michael Fragin, a spokesman for Townhouse, issued a statement: "Townhouse Center for Rehab serves some of the most vulnerable patients on Long Island in our highly specialized units and we are committed to providing the finest in long term care to our residents. Our administrators and staff treat every issue and complaint very seriously, and as the information contained in the Senate report is at this time, dated, corrective action has already been taken and completed."

Townhouse, he added, improved its supervision of nurses and training and invested in equipment.

"Townhouse's annual inspections in 2019 and 2017 show that it has minimal deficiencies and operates far better than the national, and New York, averages for skilled nursing facility," Fragin said by email.

Further, the nursing home, though placed on the pending list by the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, never was put on the formal focus list, he said. Referring to the federal agency and

the state Department of Health, he continued: "Townhouse has been notified that it is in substantial compliance with CMS and DOH," he added.

Neither the state Health Department nor the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services immediately commented. Nor did the owners of Medford Multicare Center immediately comment.

As part of the state settlement, the Medford nursing home returned \$10 million to Medicaid. Nine employees either pleaded guilty or were convicted of charges stemming from the death of a resident, a 72-year-old woman who relied on a ventilator. Those workers are: the former administrator, who falsified business records and violated health laws, three nurses, two respiratory therapists, and three aides.

A state Department of Health spokesman had no immediate comment on the federal report.

Budget cuts appear to be contributing to the problem, reducing money available for the focused inspections that are required for nursing homes on the shorter list, according to documents and interviews.



AP / CAROLYN KASTER

Mighty-dino exhibit

The Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History in Washington will reopen its dinosaur and fossil hall on Saturday. Here a Tyrannosaurus rex skeleton is seen biting a Triceratops.

MORE
INSIDE

Former Parkland deputy arrested on 11 criminal charges **A33**