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Records: 6 OPD officers currently stripped of police powers, but being paid

David Harris

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Orlando police Chief John Mina said there is no misconduct problem within his department, despite having eight officers who are suspended or were recently reinstated and another who resigned amid an investigation. Mina said the problem is with individuals making bad decisions.

The nine make up a small percentage of the 700-member department, he said.

"This is absolutely not a cultural issue," he said. "We are handling a handful of cases of which are being investigated. With any large organization you are going to have some people that make mistakes. It's important to realize that we turned over investigations to [the Florida Department of Law Enforcement] and we are being transparent in the process."

All the officers are being paid while under investigation, the department said. The officers or their attorneys declined comment or could not be reached.

Tim Lynch, director of the Washington D.C.-based Cato Institute's Project on Criminal Justice, said it's important to look out for "mere illusion of accountability."

"In too many jurisdictions, officers appear to be punished for wrongdoing, but are then reinstated and have the disciplinary action erased from their record," he said. "When that happens regularly, it is obvious that those departments are not serious about addressing police misconduct."

Suspended are: Officer Heath Williams and Det. Angel Burgos, who are under undisclosed criminal investigation by FDLE; Officers Ben Gauntlett, Michael Counihan and Michael Lemmerman, who have been charged with driving under the influence; and Jerry Jenarine, who was charged with false information to law enforcement.

Officers Richard Gregg and Almarina Abramson just came back earlier this month from being relieved of duty. Robert Afonso resigned Jan. 3 after an internal investigation.

In December, an investigation into Burgos started after a criminal allegation surfaced. Mina and a spokeswoman for FDLE declined to say what that allegation was against the 17-year veteran who makes more than \$36 an hour. He was a detective in the assault and battery unit.

Williams, a 41-year-old patrol officer, has been stripped of police powers since Nov. 10 and is still making his hourly wage of more than \$36, the department said.

Afonso resigned after an internal affairs investigation determined he filed a false report and lied about it, according to Mina. The chief declined to elaborate on the case and the city did not provide the internal affairs investigation file before deadline.

Afonso, who was hired in 2014 as a patrol officer and was relieved of duty Oct. 11, wrote in his resignation letter the investigation into him was "based on a lie" and retaliation for "bringing up the inexcusable actions of my former supervisor."

The latest officer to get in trouble was Gauntlett, 26, who was arrested in his private vehicle, on suspicion of drunken driving on Jan. 21.

The patrol officer who makes about \$25 an hour was pulled in his over by an Orange County Sheriff's Office deputy on Interstate 4 and had a blood-alcohol content nearly three times the legal limit.

Two other officers were arrested in 2016 for suspected drunken driving, according to records.

Counihan, 41, who's been with the department since 2008 and is still making his roughly \$30 an hour wage, was charged with driving under the influence after a traffic stop by Clermont police in October.

He's scheduled to go on trial on Feb. 6.

Lemmerman, 34, was arrested in April in Manatee County after the patrol officer he was involved in a hit-and-run crash. Lemmerman, who was off duty at the time, hit two parked cars in a parking lot and fled before being arrested, Florida Highway Patrol troopers said.

He's been relieved of duty ever since, still making his \$31 an hour salary. He has a court date scheduled for Feb. 14.

Jenarine, 45, was caught up in misconduct while assigned to the multi-agency Metropolitan Bureau of Investigation. His salary was not available. He was supervisor of a team of officers who are accused of conspiring to perform an illegal search of a storage unit thought to have drugs. Jenarine, an OPD officer for about 15 years, was charged in November with providing false information to law enforcement, a misdemeanor.

The case is ongoing.

Gregg and Abramson were reinstated this month.

Gregg, 38, was found not guilty Jan. 11 on a battery charge after he allegedly punched a man accused of stealing the officer's ex-wife's gun in Brevard County in June. The patrol officer was suspended on July 1 and was still making his \$28 an hour salary until his acquittal.

Abramson, 44, was suspended in October after the Orange County Sheriff's Office opened a domestic-related criminal investigation, but charges were not filed, according to Orlando police.

Abramson, a school resource officer, was making her more than \$36 an hour wage while on suspension.

Mina said he isn't making any policy changes, but does remind officers that they are held to a higher standard.

"We're one of the most transparent agencies around," Mina said. "We hold our officers accountable."

A University of Central Florida criminal justice professor said while there doesn't appear to be a systemic problem within the department, those officers apparently thought they could get away with wrongdoing — and that's something the administration needs to address.

"Something in the environment left these particular officers to think their bad behavior would be condoned or turned a blind eye to," said Jacinta Gau. "Apparently they didn't see themselves of ever having to face consequences for their actions."