



SAINT JOSEPH COUNTY POLICE

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Sheriff Bill Redman Begins Termination Process for Two County Police Officers

Saint Joseph County Sheriff Bill Redman today filed formal charging papers with the County Police Merit Board requesting the Merit Board terminate the employment of two County Police officers, Corporal Brad Bauters and Corporal James Hart. On February 5, 2021, the two officers responded to two traffic accidents involving Stephen Stopczynski. The first occurred at approximately 3:00 p.m., while the second occurred at approximately 7:45 p.m. Through an internal investigation, it was later discovered that the officers intentionally omitted from their officer reports certain facts regarding signs of impairment exhibited by Stopczynski at the earlier incident, and later made false statements during the internal investigation.

"As a result of these two officer's incomplete and false statements made about the incidents that occurred on February 5, 2021, I've made my own decision to terminate them for their actions," said Sheriff Redman. "I have an obligation to maintain public trust and the accountability of our officers to our citizens. I believe these officers' actions were isolated and do not reflect on the many other honest and dedicated officers of the St. Joseph County Police Department."

Sheriff Redman also said, "I would also like to extend my thoughts and prayers to Cassandra Zwierzynski and her children, especially to Giuliana, as she continues to heal and recover from her injuries. And also, to the Stopczynski Family for the loss of Stephen."

Prior to terminating their employment as police officers with the department, the Sheriff is required by state law to submit written formal charges to the Merit Board and provide the officers with an opportunity to have a hearing before the Merit Board. The charges filed by the Sheriff allege violation of department polices including Truthfulness, Internal Investigations, Reporting, and Conduct Unbecoming an Officer.

On February 6, 2021 after receiving an anonymous tip that County officers had an interaction with Stephen Stopczynski several hours prior to his involvement in a crash resulting in his death, Sheriff Redman ordered an investigation into the earlier incident on Crumstown Highway near Pine Road. Corporals Bauters and Hart submitted formal officer reports detailing their interaction and observations during the 3 p.m. incident. In each report, the officers stated that they did not witness any signs of intoxication or impairment by Stopczynski.

Based on these officer reports, the St. Joseph County Police Public Information Liaison issued a statement on March 10, 2021 to a local news outlet. The March 10th statement said that the officers did not witness any signs of intoxication during the 3 p.m. incident.

On March 16th, following the completion of the FACT (Fatal Alcohol Crash Team) investigation into the fatal evening crash, Chief Shepherd ordered the County Police Detective Bureau to locate and

interview anyone who came into contact with Stopczynski on February 5th and create a timeline of his actions and whereabouts during that day. After interviewing witnesses whose testimony was inconsistent with information provided by Bauters and Hart in their officer reports, County Police broadened the investigation to include the actions and statements made by Cpl. Bauters and Cpl. Hart on and following February 5, 2021. On March 26, 2021, both officers were suspended from duty.

The internal investigation included interviews of 21 individuals by a County Police investigator, including the two individuals who picked up and dropped off Stopczynski in the afternoon, the property owner where the 3 p.m. incident occurred, tavern owners & employees, and officers of the County Police Department. Based upon the full investigation, which included polygraph examinations, County Police now know that the initial officer reports and, consequently, the Department's March 10th statement, were incomplete and misleading.

Specifically, where Cpl. Bauters had stated in his report that Stopczynski "wasn't stumbling or falling over on a somewhat icy driveway," he later admitted that he saw Stopczynski shuffling or stumbling around as he was getting things out of his car, and that he noticed Stopczynski was off balance. Cpl. Bauters also admitted that he told the person who picked up Stopczynski, "I'm cutting him a break." Where Cpl. Hart had stated in his officer's report that Stopczynski "told me he had not been drinking," Hart later admitted that, after pressing Stopczynski further, Stopczynski told Hart, "I had one beer after work." After further questioning, Cpl. Hart also admitted that, after he and Bauters left the scene of the 3 p.m. incident, they met up a little further down the road and, during their discussion, Bauters said that he thought that Stopczynski was intoxicated.

Sheriff Redman said "I am glad that the officers separated the subject from his vehicle and made him get a ride home. However, the officers certainly could have done a more thorough job during the earlier incident. I wish they had owned up to that in the days following it, instead of trying to hide it. Due to those actions, I have no choice but to terminate them based upon their dishonesty during our investigation."

"The citizens of Saint Joseph County, whom we are sworn to protect and serve, have a right to expect absolute integrity from our officers," said Sheriff Redman. "We strive every day to meet these expectations. In this case, two of our officers fell demonstrably short."

Also, effective today Sheriff has placed both officers on the maximum allowable 15-days of unpaid suspension. Indiana law requires at least 14-days pass between the receipt of charges by the officer and the Merit Board hearing on the matter. That hearing date has not yet been set. James Hart has been the department since August 2013 and Brad Bauters since June 2014.

There will be no further comments from Sheriff or the Department at this time.

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