

## **Saugerties Police Chief Prepares to Sue over Suspension**

Town Police Chief Gregory Hulbert has taken the first step toward a multimillion dollar lawsuit against the town of Saugerties, the Town Board and Supervisor Gregory Helsmoortel for breach of contract, libel and slander, according to the chief's attorney.

Hulbert, who filed a notice of claim on Friday, has been on paid administrative leave since Jan. 11. According to lawyer Mathew Tully, Hulbert claims the town acted wrongly in characterizing the leave as a suspension when it had not brought any formal charges against him or even told him why he was being punished.

"It's the most absurd case I've seen in years," Tully said on Friday. "They have not fully described the allegations under investigation, if there even is an investigation."

Hulbert was placed on leave after an early morning incident on Jan. 9 in which town Police Officer John Mullen was maced and punched in the face by a driver he had stopped for lacking license plates. When Mullen drew his weapon, according to police, the suspect took off toward the Greene County line. Mullen was taken to Benedictine Hospital, but was not seriously injured.

It was never made clear why Hulbert, who was off duty, not scheduled to work and at home with his family at the time of the incident, was placed on leave along with Sgt. John Scheffel. Scheffel's case is not part of the pending claim.

By law, Tully said, charges have to be brought within 60 days after the town becomes aware of misconduct. To date, he said, Hulbert has not been informed of any charges and no disciplinary hearing has taken place.

Tully, who represents Hulbert on behalf of the New York State Police Chiefs Benevolent Association Defense Fund, said subsequent statements by town officials and members of the town police department have resulted in severe damage to Hulbert's personal and professional reputations and have caused him mental anguish and humiliation.

Tully said Hulbert was a victim of politics and that Helsmoortel has delayed the chief's reinstatement in an effort to aid the promotion potential of his own son, who is a police officer.

"The board has been mixing politics with the police," Tully said. "The town's inaction in dealing with this matter is evidence of a malicious motive."

Helsmoortel did a reporter's phone messages on Friday. The Saugerties Town Board has scheduled a special executive session for 4:30 p.m. Thursday in the at Town Hall, but the meeting notice did not say whether Hulbert's legal action would be discussed.