



Environmental Police chief suspended amid ticket-fixing claim



By [Matt Rocheleau](#)

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The head of the Massachusetts Environmental Police was suspended and placed under investigation for alleged misconduct, including scuttling a friend’s 2015 traffic citation, according to a person with direct knowledge of the probe.

Colonel James McGinn’s former neighbor told the Globe that he had called McGinn to contest the ticket shortly after it was issued in August 2015. The citation never made its way into the court system, records show.

The Environmental Police released the 2015 citation and other documents Thursday in response to a Globe records request. Hours later, Governor Charlie Baker’s administration announced McGinn was suspended without pay.

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Officials declined to provide more details, but Baker, speaking to reporters Friday afternoon, said a ticket-fixing allegation “is certainly one of the elements” of the McGinn investigation.

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McGinn previously served as Baker's personal campaign driver and was appointed in 2014 to lead the 83-officer agency, which enforces fishing, hunting, boating, and recreational vehicle laws.

Under McGinn, the department has been mired in controversies over payroll and paid detail practices, the oversight of officers, as well as patronage in hiring.

McGinn, who earned \$133,000 last year, could not be reached for comment Friday.

Last month, the Globe requested records related to \$250 citations issued to two Bedford men after their sons were allegedly caught by environmental officers riding unregistered dirt bikes.

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One of those men, Neil Couvee, told the Globe last month that he called McGinn — his friend and former neighbor — to raise objections about his citation.

McGinn “took care of it the old-fashioned way,” Couvee said. “He helped me out.”

Couvee said at the time that he never paid his ticket. Copies of Couvee’s citation and the one issued to the other man never made their way to the Registry of Motor Vehicles, according to records and a spokeswoman for the Transportation Department.

Police agencies are required to forward a copy of each citation they issue to the RMV. Furthermore, if someone appeals or pays a citation, that information is entered into the RMV’s databases, an RMV spokeswoman said.

A person with direct knowledge of the Environmental Police internal review said it includes allegations that McGinn fixed Couvee’s 2015 ticket.

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Thursday night, hours after the state suspended McGinn, Couvee told the Globe he wanted to recant his previous comments.

Couvee said McGinn had only “helped” by advising him to appeal the ticket and setting up a meeting in which an Environmental Police officer explained the law to the dirt-bike-riding teens.

“[McGinn] said to send it in for an appeal, and I got the impression that somebody would look at it,” Couvee said.

Couvee said his wife filed an appeal.

“I was expecting to see a court date, but I never saw anything since then,” Couvee said Thursday night. However, officials at the Concord District Court clerk’s office said Friday that there is no record of an appeal or of any such citation issued to Couvee.

Appeals always result in an in-person court hearing, according to an RMV spokeswoman.

Following such hearings, the court notifies the RMV about the results, which are entered into the registry’s databases.

Advised by the Globe that there was no record of an appeal, Couvee said: “If they had no record of it, then it must have gotten lost. I don’t know what happened to it.”

The Globe could not reach the other Bedford man who was also cited.

State law prohibits public employees from using their official position to give another person “unwarranted privileges or exemptions which are of substantial value and which are not properly available to similarly situated individuals.”

It also bars public employees from acting in a way that would cause “a reasonable person” to conclude the employees can be improperly influenced.

Couvee defended McGinn prior to his suspension from the police force.

“I’m glad he did it for me because I didn’t think [the citation] was warranted,” he said. “I don’t think he overstepped any boundaries in my case.”

The low-profile Environmental Police force, which operates on an \$11 million annual budget, has been under increased scrutiny following several public missteps.

In late August, the Globe reported that Environmental Police officers continued to work overtime assignments and off-duty details in the middle of the workday, scheduling their normal state work around more profitable side gigs. The agency had let the practice continue despite vowing to curb it after concerns were raised, including by Baker, in the fall of 2016.

Following the report, Baker defended the agency and said its controversial pay practice was less serious than the alleged overtime theft by dozens of State Police troopers, “a far more serious issue.”

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