

# Suffolk deputies who double-dipped to return some pay

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Six Suffolk deputy sheriffs who got county pay while serving as military reservists have agreed to return a total of \$141,700, a week after Comptroller Joseph Sawicki asked for a district attorney probe.

The deputies made individual agreements with the comptroller's office signed late Wednesday, according to Sawicki. It will result in repayments ranging from \$14,185 to \$35,528.

The repayments are an outgrowth of a county law passed in 1991 during the first Persian Gulf War allowing county employees called up as reservists to keep collecting their county salary while on duty. The understanding was that they would turn over either their military salary or their county pay, whichever was less, when they returned. The aim was to protect workers' families from any lapse in income or benefits during their military service.

"A vast number of our military reservists did the right thing and repaid the lesser of the two salaries pursuant to county law," said Sawicki, referring to 53 county reservists who paid back \$2.31 million. "But, unfortunately, a handful tried to evade the law by keeping both salaries. We had no choice but to ask the district attorney to investigate to see if any laws were broken."

Anthony Prudenti, president of the deputy sheriffs union, said he did not have detailed information about the settlement. However, earlier he said his members were "not trying to duck their responsibility" and were simply questioning how much the county was seeking.

Sawicki turned over the list to District Attorney Thomas Spota after the deputies failed to meet a Jan. 31 deadline under a new agreement with the unions that would allow reservists to repay salary but keep payments for food and housing as a compromise. Sawicki sought

\$296,000 in repayments because they missed the deadline, but the final agreements allow the deputies to pay the lesser amount.

Under the agreements, one deputy is using payroll deductions of 10 percent per paycheck, and four others are using a combination of payroll deductions and giving up unused sick and vacation time. The remaining officer, who owes \$16,000, will be giving up accrued vacation time.

Sawicki said his office is still in discussions with 17 correction officers over repayment plans. Their deadline for settling is Feb. 28.

Still unsettled is one former police officer who retired on disability in 2008 and has failed to respond to county efforts to collect the owed money. Sawicki has turned his name over to Spota. Spota's office had no comment Thursday.