

# Suffolk recouping \$1.67 million from reservists

Originally published November 4, 2013

Suffolk County Comptroller Joseph Sawicki is recouping \$1.67 million from county workers who collected both their pay and a military reserve salary but failed to return to Suffolk the lower salary, a new audit has disclosed.

The audit states that 47 of 51 employees who owe money under the 2001 program, have agreed to pay back what they owe with cash, future payroll deductions or giving up unused sick or vacation days.

The cases of two employees, who owe a total of \$157,639, were turned over to the district attorney's office for possible prosecution. Debts of two other employees who owed a total of \$29,220 were deemed uncollectable.

The program was prompted by a 2001 legislative resolution calling for military reservists on duty to be paid the difference between their military pay -- normally lower -- and their county salary along with normal county benefits. However, when the program was implemented, active reservists continued getting both salaries, but under a written county agreement were to return the lower salary once home.

Sawicki said 42 percent of the 86 employees in the program fully repaid the county, and another 14 percent made partial payments. "It was set up to be a very charitable program in appreciation of what military men and women were facing," said Sawicki. "But it's not fair to have nearly half the people honor their agreement, while others paid little or nothing."

The audit, started in 2011, found "The program was fraught with problems from the beginning." It noted there was inadequate oversight, no written guidelines or central accounting of workers in the program.

Because there were no guidelines, the audit found each department administered the program differently. The police department accounted for all 56 officers in the program, the audit stated but never sought to enforce repayment or impose any disciplinary action. The sheriff's office failed to disclose to labor relations or auditors that it had 12 employees in the program and workers were never asked to give back their military pay.

In the probation department, one employee got county pay and accruals while in the military for 19 months, even though the individual never signed papers to participate in the program. The agency also never sought repayment.