



The Times

Santiago defends police at funeral

Director says detail was 'sign of respect'

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BY EVA LOAYZA

TRENTON -- Police Director Joseph Santiago said yesterday neither he nor his family requested the police detail at his father-in-law's funeral in Newark last week, but that it was offered by the department and accepted "as a sign of respect for the position of the police director."

Santiago told the city council last night that the offer for the police detail was approved by a police captain he did not identify.

No one was ordered to attend, he said.

He said there is no formal policy and the commander made the decision based on past practices. The on-duty officers who were assigned to go to Newark have chosen to take an administrative day so the funeral detail will not cost the city, he said.

He decided not to respond to media inquiries about the on-duty officers who went to Newark because he thought it was "inappropriate" and "kind of ghoulish" and not "worthy of a response," he said.

Four on-duty officers -- two community detectives and two Metro unit motorcycle officers -- drove marked police vehicles to Newark to participate in the funeral procession for Edward Karbowski, 71, the father of Santiago's wife, Denise.

That outraged several city officers who said it was a misuse of the taxpayers' money and city property for a private citizen. One resident suggested Santiago reimburse the city the cost of any police personnel or equipment that attended the services.

Karbowski was a retired Teamsters truck driver, a Newark native and lifelong resident of that city's Ironbound neighborhood, according to his obituary.

Santiago, who went before the council yesterday after a previous appearance had to be rescheduled, said he accepted the offer for escorts with the understanding that it was part of a previous practice for retired department members, in some cases for families of active members and on a few occasions for people who were not police officers.

Of the unnamed police officers who criticized him in newspaper articles, he said, "I don't know what your motives or agendas are, but I know deep down inside a lot of this resides in those unnamed officers and the issue is really about the police director and not about funds or demonstrations of respect."

Santiago said he was not acknowledging any wrongdoing, but if someone considers it a problem, he will take responsibility as head of the agency.

He said there is no formal policy in the department for funeral details, but one will be created to specify to whom such a courtesy can be extended. It will also include a protocol for requests, which would be reviewed and approved by the director.

When told by South Ward Councilman Jim Coston that Capt. Paul Messina had said at a previous council meeting that providing police escorts was a standard practice in the city, Santiago said there is no written directive, but it has been a past practice.

Coston, who said his concern was with the taxpayers, asked for an estimate of the cost of having on-duty police officers and vehicles at the funeral.

Santiago said the four officers have requested to use administrative days to make up for the day, "so the city will bear no direct cost." He said the standard charge for police vehicles is \$5 an hour.

Coston asked whether the officers volunteered to use administrative days before or after news of the controversy appeared in the local newspapers.

Santiago said he did not know.

Coston said he was surprised that neither police or city communication officers talked to the press to "justify or clarify" the police presence in Newark.

Santiago said he directed his communication officer not to respond because, "we were in mourning and didn't think my wife and family needed to explain anything, particularly to the press as to what was going on in terms of the respect and resources provided to us at a time when it was sorely needed."

He said he thought it was extremely disrespectful that Trenton Times reporters would call him at a time when his family was suffering.

Contact Eva Loayza at eloayza@njtimes.com or (609) 989-5717.

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