

DETROIT

She reported suspected OT fraud in DPD. Her punishment prompted her to sue



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The Detroit News

June 8, 2026, 12:01 a.m. ET

Detroit — A Detroit Police lieutenant's punishment after she complained to supervisors about suspected overtime scams in her precinct prompted her to file a whistleblower lawsuit that she said exposes a culture of rampant time fraud with no oversight, and vindictiveness by command staff toward cops who report wrongdoing.

Detroit Police officials admitted under oath that there was no valid reason to suspend Lt. Lori Pierce for 30 days without pay in 2023 after she put together and shared a spreadsheet titled "The \$3 Million Unit" that showed 11 members of the 3rd Precinct's Special Operations Unit had earned more than \$3 million in salary in 2022. The officers' pay that year was boosted by more than 13,000 hours of overtime, [according to Pierce's lawsuit in Wayne County Circuit Court](#).

Pierce, a 33-year Detroit Police veteran, was suspended for disseminating classified information, even though department officials admitted during depositions in her lawsuit that the data in the Excel spreadsheet — the officers' salaries — is not classified.

"This is a case of blatant disregard for the law and moral scruples," Pierce's attorney Deborah Gordon said. "(Detroit Police supervisors) had the truth put in their faces, and they not only ignored it — they punished my client for reporting it. It's an outrage."

A Detroit News review of deposition transcripts, activity logs and other documents filed as part of Pierce's lawsuit shows DPD officials admitted policies were routinely ignored in the 3rd Precinct during the period covered in the suit, 2021-23. Supervisors regularly approved activity logs rife with what former Detroit Police Chief James White, during his deposition, characterized as "major policy violations."

Detroit Corporation Counsel Conrad Mallet declined to comment on the lawsuit, which is scheduled for a July 20 trial before Wayne County Circuit Judge Susan Hubbard. The suit, which seeks damages for Pierce "in whatever amount she is found to be entitled," names as defendants White, the city of Detroit, former Detroit Police Cmdr. Melissa Gardner, former Assistant Police Chief Charles Fitzgerald, Sgt. Jamal Hamood and Lt. Todd Messineo.

White, who left DPD in 2024 to become CEO of Detroit Wayne Integrated Health Network, told The News he learned about the "disturbing" details of the case during his deposition last year.

"I'm not a representative of the city or police department anymore, and I can't comment on the lawsuit itself, but when I found out what had happened in this case, I was concerned, and I met with the current police chief (Todd Bettison) to talk about it," said White, who was deposed April 15, 2025. "I only personally handled termination cases, and since this wasn't a termination, I delegated it, and I didn't find out how it had been handled until my deposition.

"Some of the things I learned about the way this case was handled were quite disturbing," the former police chief said.

Bettison declined to comment. Attempts to reach Gardner, Fitzgerald, Hamood and Messineo were not successful

The allegations in Pierce's lawsuit mark the latest controversy involving allegations of DPD overtime abuse. In 2019, former Police Chief James Craig ordered the department's Narcotics Section headquarters to be raided after multiple allegations

surfaced, including claims of massive overtime fraud. A two-year investigation into overtime abuse from 2019-21, [dubbed "Operation Clean Sweep,"](#) prompted 12 officers to leave the department under investigation.

Overtime costs in DPD have exploded in recent years. The city paid \$40 million in overtime for Detroit police officers during the 2017-18 fiscal year, according to a 2018 Detroit News analysis, a 136% increase over the \$16.9 million overtime allocation in 2012-13.

The city's 2026-27 fiscal year budget has \$49.17 million earmarked for Detroit Police overtime, a 40.25% increase over the \$35 million in the previous year's budget.

Special deployments, [including units that aim to quell problems downtown and at block parties,](#) have helped swell the department's recent overtime budgets.

But Pierce said there was no excuse for the number of overtime hours claimed by some of her colleagues.

"(Officers) were regularly filing for 16 to 19 hours of overtime each day, which should have raised major red flags, since department policy says you're not even supposed to work more than 16 hours total per shift," Pierce told The News. "But this was allowed to go on for years, even after I reported it. Not one of those overtime requests was ever denied, no matter how suspicious they looked."

Pierce also said she was obligated by the department's Duty to Report policy to inform her supervisors about the suspected criminality.

"I did what I was supposed to do and got punished for it," she said.

How officers logged thousands of hours in overtime in one year

Two members of the 3rd Precinct's Special Operations Unit, Sgt. Scott Barrick and Lt. James Cashion, logged nearly 4,000 hours of overtime in 2022, according to

Pierce's lawsuit and Excel spreadsheet, the accuracy of which department officials have not disputed.

Cashion's base pay in 2022 was \$98,550, but he took home \$225,779 after claiming he'd worked 1,650 hours of overtime that year, records show. Barrick, whose base pay was \$87,600 in 2022, was paid \$260,433, after logging 2,328.5 hours of overtime.

Although Detroit Police policy bars officers from working more than 16-hour shifts, "Cashion and Barrack regularly did so, but could not account for their often 16, 17, 18, sometimes 19 hours of overtime when questioned at their depositions," a motion filed by Pierce's attorneys in January said.

"Cashion testified repeatedly that Barrick's overtime, which Cashion was responsible to oversee, was not properly documented and did not support the need for overtime," the motion said. "Cashion testified that he did not properly account for his own alleged overtime in his activity logs, in violation of Department policy."

Pierce said a sergeant made her aware of the issues with Barrick and Cashion in September 2022, and that she filed dozens of complaints reporting what she said was obviously suspicious activity.

"At first, the supervisors acted like they were going to do something," Pierce said. "But they never did."

How lieutenant was disciplined after reporting her suspicions

After her supervisors ignored her complaints, Pierce said she put the spreadsheet together to present to the Detroit Board of Police Commissioners. When word got back to her bosses about the document, Pierce was suspended without pay for 30 days for two violations of department rules barring the disclosure of confidential information, according to the lawsuit.

But White and former Assistant Chief Charles Fitzgerald admitted during depositions in the lawsuit that officer pay records are public information, and that the basis for Pierce's suspension was invalid.

Pierce, who said she had a spotless discipline record prior to the suspension, was also transferred from the 3rd Precinct day shift to the midnight shift at the 6th Precinct and barred from entering her old precinct without an escort.

"They moved me as far away from where I live as they could," she said. "They did everything they could to make my life miserable."

Gardner, the former 3rd Precinct commander who is a defendant in the lawsuit, testified last year that the punishment meted out to Pierce was normally reserved for the most egregious violators. Gardner, who retired in 2023, said she couldn't recall a time when an officer was escorted from a precinct, other than cops who were accused of assaulting citizens.

Former Detroit Police Lt. Joseph Tiseo said he met a similar fate [after he reported overtime fraud](#) in the DPD Homicide Section in 2014. Despite an investigation that sustained many of his allegations, Tiseo said he was punished by department officials.

"What they did to me for coming forward was take me out of one of the most elite units in the city," said Tiseo, who retired in 2018. "I was head of the Homicide Task Force, and they moved me to (the 9th Precinct). I didn't have it in me to sue them, but I felt so hurt by what happened.

"It's the cops," Tiseo said. "You'd think they'd have a problem with other cops stealing. But they seemed more worried about me for reporting it."

Basic questions not asked during internal affairs probe

After getting no response from her supervisors, Pierce said she reported the alleged time fraud to the chief's office.

White said after Pierce reported her suspicions, "we ordered the IA investigation."

But the detective who headed the internal investigation admitted he didn't do basic tasks while looking into the allegations against Cashion and Barrick.

A comparison of Detroit Police activity logs and records from the Powerhouse Gym in Clinton Township, obtained through discovery in the lawsuit, shows Cashion was at the gym 60 times in 2020-21 while he claimed to be working.

"Internal affairs could have easily pulled those gym records, but they weren't interested in doing any kind of investigation," said Pierce's co-counsel, Sarah Gordon Thomas. "We got them, and they show (Cashion) submitted fraudulent timesheets — yet IA somehow concluded there was no fraud."

Hamood, the internal affairs detective who looked into Pierce's fraud claims, admitted during his deposition last year that his investigation was "insufficient" and "incorrect."

During his April 25, 2025 deposition, Hamood further admitted he never asked Barrick about activity logs that showed in September 2022 the accused sergeant had falsely put in for "standup time" — 20 minutes per day supervisors are allowed to prepare for their shifts.

"On the 26th Barrick stole standup time; is that correct?" Gordon, Pierce's attorney, asked, according to a transcript of the deposition. "He put in for it but he didn't work it?"

Hamood replied: "I documented that he put in for standup time, yes."

"And he didn't work it; correct?" Gordon asked. "So this is obviously a pattern you're seeing with him?"

Hamood agreed there were multiple instances of Barrick claiming standup time he hadn't worked.

"Isn't that a major fail on your part?" Gordon asked. "You've got hard, cold evidence of a guy stealing time and you don't put the sheets in front of him and ask for an explanation; correct?"

"Correct," Hamood replied.

Light punishment meted out, despite sergeant's extensive discipline record

Following Hamood's investigation, Cashion and Barrick were found to have violated the department's attendance policy and were given three-day paid suspensions that were later expunged from their records. The three-day punishment was imposed despite Barrick's extensive discipline history.

Barrick, who joined DPD in 1994, was fired in 1998 after he was found guilty of making a false oral or written statement or report, according to department records attached to the lawsuit. Although the Board of Police Commissioners upheld the firing in 2000, Barrick returned to the department, and in 2004, he pleaded guilty to conduct unbecoming of an officer and neglect of duty after he was involved in a pursuit but did not report it.

From 2006-14, Barrick was found guilty 14 times of violating the department's attendance policy. In December 2014, Barrick entered into a "Last Chance Agreement" with the department, meaning he'd be fired if charged with further department violations.

But after entering into the "Last Chance Agreement," Barrick was found guilty of two more infractions. In 2023, he was found guilty of neglect of duty following an Aug. 1, 2021, incident [in which a fellow officer punched a citizen in Greektown](#).

Also in 2023, Barrick was found guilty of his 15th attendance policy violation, stemming from the internal affairs investigation prompted by Pierce's allegations.

During his Dec. 12, 2024, deposition, Fitzgerald, the former assistant chief who is a defendant in Pierce's lawsuit, said he was friends with Barrick and that they'd

played together on the department's baseball team. Fitzgerald, who retired last month, could not be reached for comment.

Fitzgerald's son, Officer Gavin Fitzgerald, logged 634 hours of overtime in 2022 as a member of the 3rd Precinct Special Operations unit. He earned \$35,415 above his base \$73,000 salary, according to the lawsuit.

"It's been the same way at DPD for years," said former Detroit Police Lt. Charles Flanagan, who, in 2014, while head of the Narcotics Section, [reported to supervisors multiple infractions in the unit](#), including overtime fraud. "You've got nepotism and cronyism at the top, and whenever someone reports something against one of their chosen people, they shoot the messenger."

Pierce said her treatment was meant to send a message to other would-be whistleblowers.

"They wanted me to just suffer and make an example out of me — how dare she expose this particular unit and all this corruption?" Pierce said. "And for anybody else, everybody in that precinct saw what happened to me, and there's no way they're going to report anything anymore, because they say, 'Oh, we're going to get Pierced, we're going to get Pierced.' You're going to get kicked out or treated unfairly for doing the right thing."

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