

# Suffolk audit planned on double dipping

February 9, 2012 by MARTIN C. EVANS / martin.evans@newsday.com

Suffolk Comptroller Joseph Sawicki has ordered "a very serious audit" of county agencies because of evidence that police and other employees who took military leave kept their public and military pay in violation of county policy.

Sawicki said preliminary indications are that an undetermined number of county employees who "doubled dipped" might owe the county at least \$852,000 in reimbursements.

Since 2001, Suffolk employees serving in the military reserve have been allowed to remain on the county payroll while on active duty in Iraq or Afghanistan, provided they agree to pay the county their military wages once they return.

The agreement was designed to allow county employees in the National Guard or Reserve to serve their country without taking a cut in county pay and benefits. They would then surrender their presumably lower military pay as part of the agreement.

But of the 54 police officers who took advantage of the agreement, only 23 fully complied, according to an investigation done last year under the administration of then-county executive Steve Levy. Sawicki's audit is designed to determine the total number of county employees who did not live up the agreement.

The Levy administration filed lawsuits against at least nine police officers and had been planning others, then county attorney Christine Malafi said in December.

Nassau offered a similar pay arrangement to its employees but has enforced it through payroll deductions rather than voluntary payments. There do not appear to be payment delinquencies among the 64 Nassau employees who participated, said Brian Nevin, a spokesman for Nassau Executive Edward Mangano.

Sawicki said Suffolk's payment agreement is vulnerable to misuse because it relies on returning service members to tell the county the amount of their military pay and surrender it.

He also said the county has apparently has no mechanism in place to learn when a county employee returns from active duty status.

"When there's a system that relies on honesty without paperwork, it certainly raises a red flag," Sawicki said. "We're in the middle of a very serious audit."

According to court filings, one Suffolk police officer got \$74,424.58 in federal pay for active duty military service between May 2004 and November 2005 on top of his \$59,369.05 in county pay while he was away.

Another officer was paid \$123,399.57 by the county during 15 months of military leave that ended in December 2005, according to a court filing. He has refused to even tell the county how much he was paid, according to the lawsuit.

Another lawsuit alleges that a third officer did not give the county the \$57,978.64 in military pay he received during a deployment that began in April 2010 while being kept on the county payroll.