

Sneedville Police Chief Dunsmore retires amid investigation by DA's office, TBI

By Natalie Neysa Alund

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An upper East Tennessee police chief has retired amid an investigation involving a female minor, an official said Wednesday.

Sneedville Police Chief Charles "Charlie" H. Dunsmore, who worked part time for the department, gave his retirement letter to the city Friday, just one day after Mayor Dean Rhea said he was informed Dunsmore was under investigation by District Attorney General C. Berkeley Bell's office and the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation.

"As of Feb. 4, 2011, I Charles H. Dunsmore retire as chief of police of the city of Sneedville effective immediately," he wrote in a notarized statement on his letterhead.

Bell on Wednesday confirmed that "the matter is being investigated by my office and TBI. The results we hope to present to the Feb. 14 (Hancock County) grand jury."

Because it's an open investigation, Bell said he could give no further details.

TBI spokeswoman Kristin Helm also confirmed Wednesday that the TBI has launched a probe into the matter.

Rhea said an investigator with Bell's office told him that there were allegations against Dunsmore involving a female minor, but that he did not know her name or age.

Rhea said the investigator would not give him any specifics about the probe "other than the allegations being made," he said.

But he did say that as of Wednesday no criminal charges had been filed against Dunsmore.

"Until (Feb. 3) I had no knowledge there was anything going on," Rhea said. "It certainly caught me by surprise."

Rhea said he informed the city's aldermen during their regular meeting Tuesday that Dunsmore was being investigated.

None of the town's four aldermen - Larry Cody, John Mullins, Pat Riley and Scott

Shipley - returned phone calls Wednesday seeking comment on the matter.

Sneedville city hall was closed Wednesday, so information about Dunsmore's exact age and work history were not available.

He could not be reached for comment.

Rhea said Dunsmore is in his early-60s and has worked part time for the department for about a decade.

When reached by phone Wednesday, a woman who said her name is Julia Dunsmore and that she was Charlie Dunsmore's mother said he was in Kingsport having surgery. She would not give any additional information.

Natalie Neysa Alund may be reached at 865-342-6307.



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