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## Suspended Old Forge Police Chief under the gaze of the FBI

BY STEVE MCCONNELL (STAFF WRITER)

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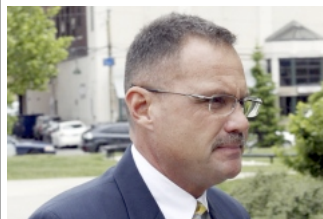
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Suspended Old Forge Police Chief Larry Semenza arrives at Lackawanna County Court for a preliminary hearing Wednesday. Michael J. Mullen / Staff Photographer

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The FBI is investigating suspended Old Forge Police Chief Larry Semenza, another twist to come to light Wednesday in what is becoming a sweeping, wide-ranging probe of the police department and the borough.

The disclosure of the FBI's eye on the chief came during a brief proceeding in central court in Scranton for what was slated to be his preliminary hearing on allegations he carried on a sexual relationship with a 15-year-old girl.

While the chief waived his right to a preliminary hearing, Deputy District Attorney Jennifer McCambridge said the FBI has opened a case on the chief and a U.S. attorney has been assigned to it. Miss McCambridge declined to specify what federal agents were pursuing, only saying the FBI inquiry of the chief is in conjunction with the probe launched by state police and prosecutors and detectives with the Lackawanna County district attorney's office.

"This is a multifaceted investigation," she said. "We continue to share information."

In an interview with The Times-Tribune Tuesday, District Attorney Andy Jarbola said the FBI was conducting interviews at his office that day in connection with the Old Forge probe.

He declined to say who agents were interviewing or the focus of the questions.

He confirmed the FBI has previously interviewed borough employees, though he would not state who was spoken to.

"There are several issues that could be considered federal crimes or violations," the district attorney said. "I'm not going to get into who else ... because I am not going to speak for the feds."

He said their investigations are tied closely together and they are working "in tandem" but he declined to further elaborate.

"We have a base set of facts, and they are part and parcel to our investigation," he said.

A spokeswoman for the U.S. attorney's office declined to comment.

The probe was sparked after the victim, who is now 23, approached investigators earlier this month and told them about the sexual relationship she had with Chief Semenza, 48, from 2004 through 2007.

She further revealed to investigators that she was sexually assaulted by Old Forge Police Capt. Jamie Krenitsky, 34, and former borough volunteer firefighter Walter Chiavacci, 46, who were also arrested and charged this month.

The Times-Tribune does not identify victims of sexual abuse.

Capt. Krenitsky and Chief Semenza are suspended without pay and remain free on bail. Capt. Krenitsky's preliminary hearing is scheduled for June 27. Mr. Chiavacci also came to the courthouse on Wednesday and waived his right to a preliminary hearing, although it was scheduled for June 27.

Miss McCambridge said Mr. Chiavacci has been providing information to investigators and she was considering having him testify at the chief's preliminary hearing.

Mr. Chiavacci "has been cooperative so far and was willing to continue his cooperation," she said.

Mr. Chiavacci declined to comment at the courthouse on Wednesday.

The scope of the criminal probe in Old Forge has expanded beyond the sexual

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allegations.

The chief is being looked at for interfering with investigations of domestic violence cases - including one at his home, according to a search warrant issued by county detectives.

Three search warrants were executed this month that led to the seizure of digital and paper records from the borough police department. Investigators also seized receipts for firefighting gear and women's underwear, a bank bag holding fines from parking tickets and expired condoms and marijuana from an office shared by Chief Semenza and Capt. Krenitsky. The victim told investigators that the chief bought her a firefighting uniform and other equipment. Investigators also confiscated a greeting card addressed to the chief from the victim.

In the interview Tuesday, Mr. Jarbola said county detectives are also examining "other aspects of Chief Semenza's conduct," though he would not elaborate citing the ongoing investigation. He would only say it involves his role as police chief.

Wearing a blue-gray blazer with matching dress pants and a white dress shirt, Chief Semenza waved off reporters' questions as he walked by a line of cameras on his way inside the courthouse at 11:15 a.m. for his scheduled preliminary hearing before Magisterial District Judge John Mercuri.

After the proceeding, Chief Semenza declined to comment outside the central courtroom when approached by a Times-Tribune reporter.

When asked if he would speak about his case, he said "no" and shook his head.

He stood alone by the courtroom door with his hands in his pockets for several minutes, waiting for his attorney, David Solfanelli.

After the proceeding, Mr. Solfanelli said while he intended to defend his client at the preliminary hearing, he said notice of the FBI's investigation of Chief Semenza gave him pause.

He did not wish to "deal with things (the allegations) piecemeal," said Mr. Solfanelli.

The preliminary hearing would have centered on the sexual assault allegations.

"We'd rather address issues collectively," he said. "The government has come forward with some additional information."

The charges - felony unlawful contact with a minor and misdemeanor counts of indecent exposure, corruption of minors, and indecent assault - will be moved to Lackawanna County Court. A formal arraignment before a county judge has been set for July 6, according to court records.

"We're not changing our position in seeking justice through the courts," Mr. Solfanelli added.

Outside the courthouse, Miss McCambridge said she intended to call the victim as her first witness.

"She was prepared to testify today," Miss McCambridge said. "She was here, ready, willing and able."

Contact the writer: smcconnell@timeshamrock.com

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Considering all that's happened on this case, how's about the Times-Tribune do some serious gum-shoe reporting, and go dig up some interesting things like did this chief's wife throw him out of the house yet?, is he sleeping on the couch?, did he have any other "girlfriends?", you know real Court-TV kinda stuff!

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