

Deceased Belen officer was under investigation

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2014 Cop Pedophile Michael Esquibel

FOR THE RECORD: *This story about a Belen police officer who committed suicide while under investigation for child sexual abuse quoted an attorney's letter to the city reminding officials of a previous case involving another Belen police officer's prosecution for rape. The detective in that case was acquitted of all charges against him in 2001. The city of Belen paid \$425,000 to the alleged victim in a civil lawsuit.*

A deceased Belen Police officer lauded by the police chief and mayor as a "model officer" and a man whose "integrity was never questioned" was under investigation by State Police for alleged sexual abuse of a minor at the time of his death.

Mike Esquibel, a school resource officer for the Belen Consolidated School District and an eight-year veteran of the department, took his own life on Sept. 19, 2014.

During Esquibel's memorial service, Police Chief Dan Robb said Esquibel had earned a commendation in 2012, according to a report in the Valencia County News-Bulletin.

Attorneys at an Albuquerque law firm representing a girl allegedly abused by Esquibel said they were shocked to learn of the laudatory comments "because (they) were aware that Esquibel was the suspect in (an) active investigation by the New Mexico State Police for criminal sexual penetration of a minor, criminal sexual contact of a minor and child exploitation."

The Belen Police Department Internal Affairs Division also was investigating Esquibel for criminal conduct perpetrated against a child, according to a statement by Michael Hart and Kelly Stout Sanchez, who represent the girl.

On Wednesday, Robb acknowledged that Esquibel was under investigation when he died, and noted the tort claim was filed two months ago.

He declined further comment, saying that it was a matter of possible litigation.

Hart and Sanchez wrote Robb in October pointing out that State Police were "preparing to arrest Officer Esquibel at the time of his death" and that Belen police were well aware of it.

"Your comments not only display an extreme lack of respect for the duties of a police officer but a complete failure to recognize that sexual conduct between an adult authority figure and a child is criminal conduct that should be condemned, not praised," the letter said.

Hart reminded Robb in the letter that in 2004, the U.S. Department of Justice found "so many failures and deficits in the Belen Police Department that the DOJ Civil Rights Division filed a

federal lawsuit against Belen and the police department. The basis for that lawsuit was, in part, evidence of an institutional tolerance for sexual assaults perpetrated by Belen Police officers.”

A Belen police officer was prosecuted and tried for rape as a result of the inquiry and many officers were discharged, Hart said in the letter, which he said should be considered as a tort claim on behalf of the child and notice that evidence relating to the Esquibel investigation should be preserved.

Hart and Sanchez also have notified the Belen Consolidated School District of its investigation and possible lawsuit on behalf of the girl.

The girl, now in high school, disclosed the abuse to her mother only this year, although she had confided in a male friend at the time and eventually disclosed the abuse to a teacher, according to the State Police report of the investigation obtained by the law firm under the Inspection of Public Records Act and provided to the **Journal**.

The teacher had asked the student why she was getting text messages on her phone from Esquibel, which led to further disclosures about events that occurred when the girl was 12 years old.

According to the police report, the girl told a friend at the time that she had gone to Esquibel's house and that he had made her perform oral sex on him.

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