



This **copy** is for personal, non-commercial use. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution you can: 1) Use the "**Reprint**" button found on the top and bottom of every article, 2) Visit reprints.theygsgroup.com/dailyherald.asp for samples and additional information or 3) **Order a reprint of this article now.**

Article updated: 1/21/2013 7:48 AM

Conviction for molesting girl doesn't stop retired Round Lake Beach cop's pension

By Bob Susnjara

Round Lake Beach taxpayers continue to provide a pension to a now-retired police officer who was convicted of molesting a 16-year-old girl while off duty and is on a law enforcement agency's sex-offender registry.

Citing state law and a legal opinion, Round Lake Beach Mayor Richard Hill said the village determined it can't end Leroy Kuffel's pension. Hill said as far as he's concerned, Kuffel's case is closed.

"We don't want to exhaust any more (village) funds," Hill said of fighting the pension, alluding to previous legal costs related to Kuffel.

Kuffel's pension went from \$52,145 to \$53,709 on Jan. 1 because he now receives 3 percent raises annually for the rest of his life, according to village records obtained through a Daily Herald Freedom of Information Act request.

Similar to a vast majority of states, Illinois law dictates no pension benefits will be paid to a retired police officer convicted of any felony relating to, arising from or in connection with the job. Round Lake Beach Village Administrator David Kilbane said officials have not pursued a change in the state's pension forfeiture regulations to cover off-duty felonies in response to the Kuffel case.

Some states have strengthened pension forfeiture rules to address police and other government workers convicted of felonies while off duty. For example, police officers in Ohio lose their pensions if convicted of certain felonies, including a sex offense against a minor, under a law revised in 2008.

Government watchdog Jim Tobin, president of Taxpayers United of America's Illinois branch, continues to voice concerns about public employee pensions that he contends should not top an average Social Security annual income of \$22,000. He said not only are most state and municipal pensions too generous, but they also should be denied to police officers and other public employees convicted of felonies, regardless of whether the crime was job-related.

"You could be convicted of murder and still get a government pension, let alone molest a 16-year-old girl," Tobin said. "Anything goes in Illinois."

In Illinois, towns under 500,000 in population are required by state law to establish and administer a police pension fund that's fed by a property tax levy. The fund, typically controlled by a local board, is for the benefit of police officers, surviving spouses, children and certain other dependents, according to state statute.

Hill said he's split on his thoughts about Kuffel's case — a pension earned for service on the job is just that.

"If it (the conviction) was connected to (Kuffel's) job in any way, I'd like to see it taken away," he said

...the conviction, was connected to (Kuffel's) job in any way, he likes to see it taken away," he said.

Kuffel, 55, of unincorporated Lake Villa Township, was a police officer for 29 years when he was charged with aggravated criminal sexual abuse in April 2009 and retired soon after his arrest.

He was convicted in a Lake County circuit court jury trial in May 2010 and he was sentenced to a 60-day local jail term and 30 months of additional confinement, with release only for work and sex-offender treatment.

At trial, the girl testified she became close to Kuffel as she was ending a relationship with his son. The teen said Kuffel brought her a pair of gym shoes, paid her wireless telephone bill and took her to dinner often.

Testimony showed the 16-year-old girl and Kuffel had sex twice in February 2009 and once in March of that year. She testified all three of the sexual encounters were at Kuffel's house.

Speaking on behalf of his client, attorney Charles Smith of Waukegan said there was no testimony about Kuffel being on the job when the molestation occurred, so he has every right to the pension that required personal contributions of 9.91 percent of his salary.

"It had nothing to do with his duties as a police officer," Smith said of Kuffel's conviction.

Classified as a "predator" on the Lake County sheriff's [sex-offender](#) website, Kuffel began receiving monthly payments based on a full-year starting pension of \$48,060 on Sept. 20, 2009, according to Round Lake Beach records. His final salary was \$66,290 when he retired.

As of July 1, Kuffel was old enough to qualify for the lifetime 3 percent raises annually, which gave him an extra \$340 per month for the rest of 2012, Round Lake Beach police pension fund documents show.

Kuffel's pension is projected at \$70,079 when he reaches the common retirement age of 65 in 2022. He would top \$1 million in total pension received in 2026.

If Kuffel were in Ohio, he wouldn't collect a pension.

Under the revisions that became law in May 2008, the Ohio Police and Fire Pension Fund's forfeiture regulations were tightened. A criminal court judge must order a pension forfeiture if a law-enforcement officer is convicted of certain felony offenses.

Ohio Police and Fire Pension Fund spokesman David Graham said a conviction for a sex crime against a minor would result in a cop losing the annual retirement payments. An affected officer is entitled to receive any personal contributions accumulated toward a pension.

Democratic Pennsylvania state Sen. Larry Farnese soon intends to reintroduce legislation that would prevent state and municipal employees, including police, from collecting pensions if convicted of a sex offense against a minor and ordered to register with authorities under Megan's Law, said his spokesman, Cameron Kline.

Farnese's proposal would amend Pennsylvania's Public Employee Forfeiture Act. Kline said Farnese began pushing for the change in 2011 after a Philadelphia newspaper's story about retired city police officers receiving pensions after convictions for felonies that included involuntary deviant sexual intercourse and unlawful contact with a minor.

"The main reason we introduced the (pension) legislation is as a deterrent, so this does not happen again," Kline said.

ÿ Daily Herald staff writer Mick Zawislak contributed to this report.