Coach’s lawyer: Police audit supports excessive force claim

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Youth hockey coach arrest:

Robert Andersen says police used excessive force on him and pressed baseless charges against him.

By RYAN LESSARD

Union Leader Correspondent

SALEM — Michael Delaney, the attorney representing a youth hockey coach arrested by Salem police in December 2017, said a new audit report of the police department supports his client’s claims regarding mistreatment by the department.

“The police used excessive force on him, and when he questioned their actions, the Salem Police Department retaliated by pressing baseless criminal charges against him,” Delaney said in an emailed statement.

The 177-page redacted report by Kroll Inc. was released Friday by Town Manager Christopher Dillon. It outlines a pattern of mismanaged internal investigations, ignored or stifled citizen complaints and a culture that intimidates and chafes against town authority.

It also sheds new light on how the department approached a complaint that criticized how police handled the arrest of youth hockey coach Robert Andersen of Wilmington, Mass., on Dec. 2, 2017.

Police came to the ICenter that day responding to a verbal fight between a group of angry parents after the game was ended early by referees. Several parents said when he was arrested, and criticized police for using what they viewed as unnecessary force.

According to the Kroll report, no attempts were made to interview the citizen who filed the complaint or any of their witnesses. Instead, officers interviewed witnesses who supported the police version of events after “adverse” media coverage of the arrest months later.

“For this I Center complaint, no interview was conducted with the citizen who filed the complaint or any of their witnesses. Instead, the investigation was essentially one-sided, in favor of the police,” the report states.

An officer was allegedly injured during attempts to arrest Andersen.

Andersen was charged with assaulting an officer and resisting arrest. He has a jury trial scheduled for May.

Kroll found that the Salem Police Department only did an informal inquiry into a citizen complaint into the matter, rather than a formal internal affairs investigation. The inquiry concluded the complaint was not justified after less than 24 hours.

“Kroll did not interview the citizen who filed the complaint or any of their witnesses. Instead, the investigation was essentially one-sided, in favor of the police,” the report states.

Delaney said he found it “remarkable” that, after this audit, Andersen’s charges weren’t dropped immediately.

Moving forward, Delaney said he will be taking steps to try to get a full, unredacted copy of the audit report, which he views as a critical piece of Andersen’s defense.

Delaney is a former New Hampshire Attorney General and the current director of litigation at the McLane Middleton law firm.

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| Andersen was trying to mediate a fight between parents | Delaney said. |

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