

Judge recommends ax for blackface cop, Safir weighs ruling

By Tom Hay

NEW YORK (AP) — A judge has recommended firing a cop who rode on a racist Labor Day parade float in Queens last month, according to a copy of the decision that has yet to be made public, *The New York Times* reported last week.

Police Commissioner Howard Safir, who would not confirm details of the ruling, said he would review it before deciding the officer's fate, the paper said.

Safir has previously said he would fire Officer Joseph Locurto once the officer's right to an administrative trial was met.

The city suspended Locurto and two firefighters without pay on Sept. 11 after they were identified as being among the nine people

on a Labor Day parade float in Broad Channel, a predominantly white community in an isolated area of southern Queens. Locurto's 30-day suspension ended Saturday and he went back on the payroll, as the law stipulates.

The men wore blackface and Afro-style wigs, threw watermelon and fried chicken and mocked the bias murder of a black man in Texas, all under the banner "Black to the Future 2098."

The officer was charged by the department with conduct prejudicial to the force and with knowingly associating with people or organizations that advocate hatred, oppression or prejudice toward a racial or religious group. The charges are not criminal.

During his trial, Locurto was defended by

New York Civil Liberties Union lawyers who argued that he was illegally suspended for exercising his free-speech rights.

He was off-duty at the time of the parade. Locurto, on the force 4 1/2 years, has admitted he was on the float, and apologized for it.

Last month, the officer filed a federal lawsuit demanding the NYPD give him his job back.

In her ruling, Rae D. Koshetz, the department's deputy commissioner of trials, said Locurto was just trying to have a good time and had no intention of making social commentary by appearing on the float, the *Times* said.

"I find this float was designed to mimic

and mock a racial group," she wrote, calling the officer's claim of public-spirited speech both disingenuous and self-serving, the paper said.

"By signing this decision, this message will be broadcast clearly and unequivocally: The New York Police Department doesn't tolerate this kind of behavior," she concluded. "I therefore recommend that the respondent be dismissed from the force."

The judge who presided over a separate administrative trial for the firefighters has not said when she would issue her recommendation to Fire Commissioner Thomas Von Essen.

Additional papers on the matter were to be filed Wednesday.

Judge slaps Brawley with \$185,000 in defamation damages

POUGHKEEPSIE, N.Y. (AP)—Tawana Brawley was ordered to pay \$185,000 in damages by a judge who said the young black woman fails to understand the grief she's caused by claiming she was raped by a gang of white men.

"It is probable that in the history of this state, never has a teen-ager turned the prosecutorial and judicial systems literally upside down with such false claims," State

Supreme Court Justice S. Barrett Hickman wrote Friday.

The damages were awarded to Steven Pagonis, a white former prosecutor who was falsely accused by Brawley's advisers of taking part in the alleged rape. More than two months ago, a jury ordered the advisers to pay Pagonis \$345,000 for defaming him.

The advisers, the Rev. Al

Sharpton, C. Vernon Mason and Alton Maddox, created a furor in 1988 by alleging that a 15-year-old Brawley was attacked by a group of white men. A grand jury later found evidence Brawley, now 26, concocted her tale. It specifically exonerated Pagonis.

During her advisers' defamation trial, Brawley ignored repeated attempts to get her to appear in court and

tell her story under oath for the first time.

Pagonis actually won a default judgment against Brawley in 1991 after she ignored his subpoenas. But the judge waited until the advisers' trial was over before assessing damages against her.

Hickman awarded Pagonis \$180,000 in punitive damages and \$5,000 in compensatory damages.

Pagonis did not immediately respond to attempts to contact him Friday. But he has said he doesn't have much hope of collecting the money owed him.

Brawley, who now lives in the Washington area, has avoided speaking to the media and could not be reached Friday.

"Tawana Brawley appears caught up in her own fiction

and unwilling or unable to recognize the grief and hurt she caused those she wrongly accused," Hickman wrote.

The judge called it appalling that Brawley traveled from her home to appear at a rally in New York at the start of the trial, but failed to travel 70 miles north to Poughkeepsie to testify. Hickman said Brawley "thumbed her nose at the jury."

Hot line opens for minorities stopped because of race

By Louinn Lota

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A civil rights group opened a toll-free hot line last week for motorists to call when they've been stopped by police because of their race.

"Thousands upon thousands of anecdotal stories strongly suggest that African Americans and Latinos are far more likely to be stopped while driving than whites," Ramona Ripston, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern

California, said last week. "We now need a statistical basis to see whether or not this information is in fact true."

The ACLU took action after Gov. Pete Wilson vetoed a bill by Assemblyman Kevin Murray, D-Culver City, that would have required police and highway patrol officers to keep statistics on whom they stop and why, and whether a ticket or citation was issued.

"What we're hoping is that

we gather enough anecdotal evidence to have the bill reintroduced in February," Ripston said. "We'll tally the incidents and we'll get some information on what is happening to people of color."

Murray, who is black, was stopped in June by a Beverly Hills police officer as he and his fiancée rode his Corvette to a restaurant for a victory celebration. Murray had just won a hard-fought primary campaign for a state Senate

seat. Several states have traffic stop statistic laws, and U.S. Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., has introduced HR 118, a national Traffic Stop Statistics Act.

The ACLU's toll-free

number is 877-DWB-STOP (877-392-7867). DWB stands for "Driving While Black or Brown." Information is confidential. The survey is not scientific and cases will not be checked for validity.

Students

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\$325,000 of which goes to school district police officers. Approximately \$600,000 will be spent to hire additional staff, buy more metal detectors and supporting random locker searches.

"This is not just a police issue, its a student issue, a teacher issue, a school issue, and a community issue," said Sheriff Jerry Keller, flanked by police chiefs representing various local law enforcement agencies. "You have to have courage to tell your friends, 'Don't bring your guns to school.'"

"The program is good for younger kids," Clark senior Carin Chan said. "Weapons need to be kept off campus because even though you may not see them, you know they are around."

Atonement

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