

Cops

(Continued from Page 2)

low-cost health coverage for children in low-income working families.

In Chicago the mayor has put city employees on unpaid leave to help fill a budget shortfall. But a little over a year ago, Chicago officials agreed to pay \$19.8 million to four men who suffered police torture under then-commander Jon Burge.

Some \$30 million has been spent to settle assorted lawsuits connected with the case, which stretches back to abuses during the 1980s and 1990s.

Mayor Richard Daley proposed a two-to-three day furlough for more than 4,000 non-union workers to ease the city's budgetary crisis.

The \$30 million payout doesn't count millions of dollars spent defending Burge after he was fired by the police department in 1993, said a staffer at the People's Law Office, which has represented torture victims. City attorneys and private attorneys were paid to defend a man whose firing bore witness to his guilt, said the staffer. This doesn't even count the human toll, which is worse, because of how Blacks, Latinos and the poor are abused by officers, said the staffer.

Big price tags for cop abuses aren't new

Current budget problems may cause taxpayers to take a look at how their money is spent, but in Chicago \$18 million was paid to the family of LaTanya Haggerty, a Black woman shot to death by police in 1999. In 1995, a *New York Times* editorial noted that in the "cash-starved" Big Apple, brutality settlements and court judgments cost the city \$87 million over five years.

The Rodney King beating cost Los Angeles \$3.8 million in a settlement and estimates for property damage hit \$700 million after riots when officers involved were acquitted. In 2001, the city of New York shelled out \$7.125 million in the infamous Abner Louima case, in which the Haitian immigrant was assaulted with a plunger by officers in a precinct bathroom.

"This is shameful because right now if you're already suffering from a \$150 million budget deficit and you have three or four huge lawsuits, you have to find that money, so it makes sense to train and educate officers on the front end rather than pay for settlements on the back," said

Ronald Hampton, executive director of the National Black Police Association.

"All their priorities are turned upside down and instead of discouraging more police brutality from occurring, they are basically encouraging it. The money could have been used to offset all of Gov. Schwarzenegger's budget cuts," said John Parker, West Coast coordinator of the International Action Center, in Los Angeles.

With the exception of the Grant case, it is rare that police officers face any possible penalty for excessive force and misconduct, Parker said.

Police watch groups say that another challenge to police misconduct is being able to track the numerous settlement cases and how they balance with criminal prosecutions of officers.

Information about settlements may be secret

The ease or difficulty of getting records of payments in police misconduct cases depends on the particular state and state law, according to Brigitt Keller, executive director of the National Police Accountability Project. For example, Keller said, in Massachusetts, settlements paid out of the city's budget are public record and the terms can be made available with a public records request. However, settlements paid through insurance companies may be confidential.

According to civil rights attorneys, since many abuse cases never make it to trial, the real costs of these settlements are unknown. "Many civil rights cases are dismissed on summary judgment, a method that individual judges use to dismiss or get rid of cases.

Many are dismissed by White judges, often in federal court, and there's no recognition by the judge of the racial issues in the case," said civil rights attorney Christopher Cooper, of Merrillville, Ind., outside of Chicago. Lawyers' best advice to plaintiffs, especially if they are Black, is for them to take the settlement or risk having their case tossed out, he said.

Atty. Michael Haddad, who has been fighting civil rights cases for 17 years, said the settlements are only the tip of the iceberg because attorneys probably talk to 100 people who say police abused them before they can take one case. "It's so hard to prove these cases because the juries like to give police the benefit of the doubt... so

the high cost is high but the human cost is much higher because the vast majority of victims never get compensated," said the Oakland-based lawyer.

Unfortunately, Haddad added, the settlements create budgetary problems because most cities don't plan for it, but some cities have insurance that kicks in after so many millions. They could save so much more if they spent money to prevent the misconduct in the first place, he said.

Haddad said that in a 2004 lawsuit he filed in Oakland, the police chief acknowledged a longstanding pattern of improper strip searches of people on the street. After four years, his firm uncovered some 40 victims of the strip searches. In 2008, although a federal judge ruled that the policies were unconstitutional, the city has not revised the policy and continues to use it.

"Now they're facing a very big case with these 40 plaintiffs and probably will end up having to pay a significant amount of money to these victims," Haddad said.

Legal challenges to police abuse expensive, rare

Kenavon "KC" Carter, an Austin, Texas-based criminal defense attorney, said it is important to understand that the battle against police brutality will not be won with lawsuits alone. "It's going to take community organizing, public education and a legislative strategy to put pressure on police departments and city councils to hold their officers accountable," he said.

According to Carter, it takes at least \$50,000 to even bring a civil rights lawsuit alleging police brutality. Such cases are difficult to win because police officers are protected by the principle of qualified immunity, he said. "All an officer has to

say when they've shot some brother down in the street, in the back, is that they had to make a split second decision, and that decision was to use deadly force. The courts allow them to get a pass," he said.

"A lot of civil rights organizations, ACLU, NAACP and others are really picking and choosing cases to litigate on because they're so expensive. They're not successful and really not an effective strategy on holding police accountable for the conduct of their officers."

Carter established Hip Hop Against Police Brutality Project under the sponsorship of the Texas ACLU's Police Accountability Office. What he has found throughout his legal career is that along with city councils, the real power brokers for police misconduct are district attorneys and police chiefs from civil settlements to criminal prosecutions.

District attorneys are elected officials, so if communities are dissatisfied with their performances, one option is to vote them out, Carter said. The problem is, however, police officers have strong police unions that put a great deal of pressure on police chiefs, district attorneys and whoever they feel is a threat to cops who step out of line.

On the other hand, Carter added, citizens have to give good D.A.s political cover when they try to do the right thing. "D.A. Craig Watkins in Dallas, Texas, who is Black, has reopened and overturned 20 wrongful convictions placed on the books by the former D.A. because he saw a pattern of wrongdoing, but now he's under pressure by the rest of his class of prosecutors to ease up. He's going to be in trouble in the next election if people don't stand up and

(See Cops, Page 11)

Your Horoscope Says... Mar. 5-11

ARIES

Challenges will be ever present for you this week. Work at it calmly knowing that you are getting some things out of the way. Tackle tasks using your famous self-control rather than your passion. Use your passion on the weekends. Let loose! Be free!

Soul Affirmation: The sunlight of my spirit shines in the land beyond the horizon.

Lucky Numbers: 23, 34, 51

TAURUS

Harmonious communications are part of your charm, and you'll get far this week by speaking your word in an easy-going way. You'll find that your domestic arrangements are very comfortable to you.

Soul Affirmation: I let my words reveal the not-so-hidden truth about my being.

Lucky Numbers: 3, 4, 12

GEMINI

This week is a good week to get in touch with your emotional self. You will respond well to what people close to you will ask from you. Your loved ones will appreciate your kindness when they find out how highly sensitive you are to their needs.

Soul Affirmation: My life itself is my greatest creation.

Lucky Numbers: 8, 19, 54

CANCER

You know what you want and you have the ability to make it happen. Step into action at work this week and you will get a lot done. You can get what you want without being too demanding. Enjoy the time you have with your family. True rewards come from those who are related to you by blood.

Soul Affirmation: Truth is revealed in the smallest grain of sand.

Lucky Numbers: 2, 4, 6

LEO

Live this week with an adventurer's spirit. Trade in the comfortable for the exciting; the reliable for intriguing; the familiar for the new. Perhaps a change of scenery will get you started. You will rediscover feelings that you have denied yourself for a while.

Soul Affirmation: Communication is a skeleton key that fits many doors.

Lucky Numbers: 10, 12, 13

VIRGO

If you've just made a power move in your work life or love life, you couldn't have timed it any better. There will be a new level of appreciation and admiration for your leadership and forcefulness.

Soul Affirmation: I work hard to combat envy this week.

Lucky Numbers: 15, 30, 34

LIBRA

You've made your point. Now wait. Wait for the feedback about the impact it had on the people around you. Be careful of those who don't celebrate with you. They feel the impact and are resisting the positive effects.

Soul Affirmation: Before goodness can come I must expect goodness.

Lucky Numbers: 5, 16, 23

SCORPIO

Be sharp! All of your needs will be met in indirect ways. Gifts will come from unexpected sources. They will be carefully packaged to go unnoticed. Unwrap everything and look inside. There will be empty boxes, but there will also be a prize in an unanticipated situation.

Soul Affirmation: I look for the good in all that comes to me this week.

Lucky Numbers: 3, 10, 41

SAGITTARIUS

Don't respond to situations in a hasty

manner this week. Your impulsive side is strong. Suppress it. Play a game called self-control. You know that this is the kind of game that you can win easily. Smile as you play at not being emotionally affected by an important matter, and eventually you'll really not be emotionally affected.

Soul Affirmation: I give my mind a holiday again this week.

Lucky Numbers: 4, 28, 50

CAPRICORN

Offer to help someone in your office who is struggling with a difficult project that you have mastered in the past. There will be several birthday celebrations that you are invited to. Attend them all! Celebrate!

Soul Affirmation: I give thanks for who I am this week.

Lucky Numbers: 12, 19, 22

AQUARIUS

Think of who you like to have fun with. Give them a call. Plan something that diverts you from your unexciting tasks. Spend some money. Find a place that jumps. Jump with it. Flirt. Even serious people flirt once in a while, especially if you've worked your buns off all week.

Soul Affirmation: The true path is mapped out by my impulses.

Lucky Numbers: 9, 10, 27

PISCES

You're likely to experience a blast from the past. An acquaintance will meet up with you again. Don't be shy in establishing a more solid friendship this time. It could lead to something important professionally or personally. Love sometimes works better the second time around.

Soul Affirmation: Smooth communications is the key to my success this week.

Lucky Numbers: 16, 17, 20