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Investigation Clears Riverside Police Leadership of All Major Allegations

Chief Sergio Diaz and Assistant Chief Chris Vicino Waive Privacy Rights, Agree to Disclosure

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – City Manager Scott Barber announced today that an independent investigation has refuted all major allegations that Police Chief Sergio Diaz and Assistant Chief Chris Vicino improperly used Police Department funds, as alleged by a former administrator.

Barber made the announcement after both Diaz and Vicino relinquished their rights to confidentiality in connection with the investigation. Both men said they made the decision because they wanted the public to know the results of the investigation, even though one allegation against Vicino was sustained. Otherwise, the results could not have been made public under the law.

“I appreciate Chief Diaz and Assistant Chief Vicino taking the step they did in order to ensure that the public can know that its police administrators are running the department in an ethical and proper manner,” Barber said. “I am gratified that the public can have a full accounting of the allegations and the ensuing investigation.”

Of eight allegations raised by former Police Administrator Karen Aquino, seven were found to be unfounded. In the only sustained allegation, Aquino alleged that Vicino used a city copier for personal reasons and implied that he asked another employee for the employee’s access code in order to make additional color copies for personal use.

During the investigation, Vicino acknowledged making about 300 copies during a three-year period in connection with a college course he taught. He said he sent a letter to an Assistant City Manager expressing regret for the oversight and pledging it would not happen again and enclosed payment for \$30.50. The part of the allegation involving Vicino allegedly asking for an employee’s access code so he could make color copies for his personal use was found to be unfounded.

Vicino told investigators he did ask another employee for the access code to the color copier, but only because he had forgotten his access code and needed to make color copies for a presentation that Diaz was going to do on a new strategic plan for the department.

“I have always had faith that an impartial investigation would reveal that this department is run according to the highest ethical standards,” Vicino said. “I regret using the copier for a personal use,

but I'm willing to take my medicine out in the open if that is what it takes for the larger issues to be resolved in the minds of the public.”

Other allegations explored in the investigation included:

- That the department misappropriated city funds by directing employees to participate in Riverside Police Foundation activities while on duty. The foundation, which supports youth programs, is part of the Department's mission to prevent crime, therefore use of city resources was appropriate, the investigation found.
- That Vicino engaged in disrespectful and intimidating behavior toward Ms. Aquino. Vicino did not intentionally engage in such behavior and his response was a direct reaction to statements made by Aquino toward another employee during a meeting, the investigation found.
- That the Department improperly used asset forfeiture funds to purchase vehicles. The investigation found no evidence that either Diaz or Vicino used such funds improperly.
- That the Department failed to follow the requirements of a \$5.1 million federal grant to hire 15 new police officers. The investigation found no evidence to support that.
- That police administrators failed to notify Aquino that a city vehicle and gas card were used by a retired police employee to help the department participate in the “Baker to Vegas” charity run. There is no evidence to suggest the car or gas card were used inappropriately and department administrators had no obligation to notify Aquino of the pending use.
- That Aquino was directed to pay for golf tournaments out of the department's general fund and that thousands of dollars were spent so that Vicino and others could play golf. Aquino was describing charity golf tournaments that department personnel participated in to assist local organizations in raising funds for children's programs. Investigators described this allegation as “a significant stretch from the truth.”
- That Diaz signed a contract for a Parole and Corrections Team without proper review of the City Attorney's Office. The investigation found that this allegation “lacked any validity whatsoever” and that the memorandum of understanding was signed by all appropriate parties.

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