

The Marion Star

Suspension hearings held for officers

CLEVELAND (AP) — Private departmental hearings began Friday for 23 suspended police officers arrested after an FBI probe into alleged protection of illegal gambling.

Hearings before Safety Director Carolyn Watts Allen were closed to the press and public, said Alan Seifullah, spokesman for Mayor Michael R. White.

Ms. Allen was expected to continue the suspensions pending outcome of trials, said Patrick D'Angelo, attorney for the officers.

D'Angelo said it may be possible for the indicted police officers to raise an entrapment defense because they were the targets of a sting operation.

"Clearly it was an FBI-created gambling operation, with the objective of trying to obtain Cleveland law enforcement officers to work security," D'Angelo said. "So there does appear to be a legitimate issue on the matter of entrapment. There may be other defenses, but it depends on facts and circumstances."

Although the indictments spoke only of police protection of illegal gambling spots, William Branon, FBI agent-in-charge of the Cleveland office, said Thursday that the FBI created and operated three gambling operations and paid Cleveland police officers for security and protection against raids.

One alleged gambling spot above a show bar was not an FBI front, but led to an indictment against one police officer.

Robert E. Bulford, an assistant U.S. attorney who helped present the case to a federal grand jury, said Friday he could not comment on any aspect of the case.

"There are Justice Department guidelines and a code of professional responsibility, and I'm not supposed to comment on those matters," Bulford said.

In a statement Thursday, Joyce George, U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Ohio, said the case sends a message that "no one, includ-

ing an officer charged with enforcing the law, is beyond the law."

D'Angelo, who often handles legal matters for the Cleveland Police Patrolmen's Association, said defense lawyers will have to closely study the government's evidence.

"Video and audio tapes need to be examined and reviewed," he said. "Initially it seems to be clear, though I don't mean to be prejudging, that the FBI created the operation, had undercover sting agents operating it and was seeking out law enforcement officers to work security by saying the games had professional-type people who were afraid of being robbed."

The gambling sting began in May 1989 under a code name, which Branon would not reveal. Cleveland police Chief Edward Kovacic did not know about the operation until August, when he met with Branon to seek FBI help to bust the suspected gambling spots and any police who may be involved.

The indictments also charged seven former Cleveland police officers, a city Metroparks System police officer and 16 civilians. Some of those indicted faced charges stemming from police protection of a marijuana shipment, allegedly from Kentucky to Cleveland, which Branon said the FBI also arranged.

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