

News > Local (/News/Local/)

Hampshire sheriff candidate Patrick Cahillane's parade march raises campaign questions

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NORTHAMPTON — Some parade-goers and contenders for Hampshire County sheriff were dismayed to learn that Democratic candidate Patrick Cahillane marched in the Chesterfield Fourth of July parade in the presence of county sheriff's vehicles — a possible violation, they say, of the state's conflict of interest law.

In photos published on his Facebook page, Cahillane, who is the current deputy superintendent at the sheriff's department, is shown helping carry a campaign banner bearing his name. Behind him are several uniformed officers and at least one Hampshire sheriff's vehicle.

State law specifically prohibits the use of governmental resources — like sheriff's vehicles — for political purposes.

"Governmental resources include anything that is paid for by taxpayers, e.g., personnel, paper, stationery and other supplies; offices, meeting rooms and other facilities; copiers, computers, telephones, fax machines; automobiles and other equipment purchased or maintained by the government," according to the statute.

Citing confidentiality restrictions imposed by state law, a spokesman for the Massachusetts State Ethics Commission — the agency that oversees enforcement related to conflict of interest and financial disclosure laws — could not say Monday whether the commission received any complaints.

In an interview with the Gazette, Cahillane acknowledged he did, indeed, march in the Chesterfield parade along with sheriff's vehicles, but that there was no intention to gain an unfair advantage or violate any laws relating to his campaign.

"I'm doing the best I can to keep everything separate. I'm trying to walk the best balance I can," Cahillane said. "I didn't even think there was an issue ... it had nothing to do with trying to violate the ethics of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts."

Other candidates for the office who attended the parade, Democrats Kavern Lewis and Melissa Perry, said they each took note of Cahillane and the sheriff's vehicles.

"If he can do it, I would think all the other candidates can do it," Lewis said. "He's going to get away with certain things because he's well known."

Perry and David Isakson, the lone Republican candidate, declined further comment. Isakson said he did not attend or march in the parade.

Chesterfield resident Matt L. Barron, who said he attended the parade, penned a letter to the editor, published July 7 in the Country Journal, which covers Chesterfield, expressing concern.

"Patrick Cahillane was marching with supporters holding a large banner that read 'Patrick Cahillane Democrat for Hampshire County Sheriff' and directly behind him was a group of employees of the sheriff's department, including those driving two state vehicles owned by the agency," Barron wrote in the letter.

"It led people to conclude it was an endorsement," Barron later said in an interview, "that they were there to support his candidacy."

Barron is a Democratic political consultant and strategist based in Williamsburg, but is not associated with any of these campaigns.

Cahillane said that he has not asked any agencies to support his candidacy at this point.

"I'm running as Pat Cahillane — the candidate who has 30-plus years experience helping manage the sheriff's office," he said, adding that locals associating him with the sheriff's department was unavoidable considering his experience.

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