Retired officer receives pay despite dissent

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WINSTED—Police Capt. Francis J. O'Neill received his retirement severance pay at 4 p.m. Friday after the town attorney said a vote of selectmen to grant O'Neill's severance was not subject to challenge by a town meeting and referendum.

But Charlene LaVoie, the town's community lawyer, said Friday afternoon she disagreed with the opinion given by town attorney Stephen O. Allaire.

LaVoie said circulators of the town-meeting and referendum petitions might take the town to court.

Selectmen voted 3-2 on June 3 to give O'Neill severance pay, including $10,000 and $4,430 in medical benefits for a year.

Allaire could not be reached for comment.

Democratic Selectmen Walter D. Miller and John F. Gauger Jr., with other residents, had circulated petitions Thursday to force a town meeting and referendum on O'Neill's severance pay, a subject of controversy for nearly two months.

Miller also disagreed Friday afternoon with the town attorney's opinion.

"I will recommend to everyone that we go to court in Litchfield and let the judge decide," he said.

The petitions were filed with Town Clerk William T. Riiska about noon Friday. Miller said they contained 365 signatures, well over the approximately 300 needed to force a town meeting and refendum on the vote by the board of selectmen.

Selectmen voted 3-2 on June 3 to give O'Neill severance pay, including $10,000 and $4,430 in medical benefits for a year. He would also receive $5,000 from next year's town budget, to be made up by the police union in concessions.

Selectmen voted 4-3 Monday night to transfer funds to pay O'Neill. A contract for O'Neill's severance was signed Wednesday afternoon by Town Manager Wayne W. Dove.

Police Chief Joseph M. Ligi and other police officers Friday morning had cake and coffee in honor of O'Neill's retirement and gave him small mementos.

He was a Winsted police officer for 28 years.