

Lawyer: Chief, Dog Have Same Degree

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FOSTORIA, Ohio -

The city's police chief and police dog have degrees from the same online school, according to a defense lawyer challenging the chief's authority.

The issue gives "one pause, if not paws, for concern" about what it takes to get a degree from the school, based in the Caribbean, Gene Murray wrote Monday in a motion seeking to have the dog introduced as evidence.

Chief John McGuire and Rocko - listed as John I. Rocko on his diploma - are graduates of Concordia College and University, according to copies of diplomas that are part of Murray's motion.

Murray did not say how he knows the criminal justice degree is for the dog or how Rocko supposedly enrolled in the college.

A woman who responded to an email from The Associated Press Thursday listed on what appeared to be the school's Web site said that the college is legitimate and that no alumnus named Rocko was listed in its database. The woman, Elizabeth C. Marley, said the diplomas may have been issued by someone operating a spoof of the school's site.

However, the woman would not provide a phone number, and it could not be confirmed that she was a spokeswoman or representative for the school.

Dean Henry, McGuire's lawyer, said the department had the dog before McGuire was hired.

"My client had absolutely nothing to do with any animal getting a degree from an institution of higher learning," Henry said. "The whole thing is bizarre."

Henry said that he believes the school that gave his client a degree was based in the Virgin Islands, but that he hasn't been able to contact officials there through a letter or e-mail.

Murray argues that a drug charge against his client should be dismissed because McGuire was not legally employed and had no authority as an officer.

McGuire, hired as chief in this northwest Ohio city a year ago, is to go on trial this month on charges of falsification and tampering with records. A special prosecutor said McGuire lied on his application and resume about his rank, position, duties, responsibilities and salary in three of his previous jobs.

City leaders have said McGuire's hiring was not influenced by his college degree, and any confusion about his background was resolved during interviews.

Egbert said he will ask the judge to deny the request that Rocko appear in court.

"I don't think it's necessary to bring the actual dog," Egbert said.