

trade words

By ED HOWELL
Eagle Senior Writer

CARBON HILL — Police Chief James Browne says he may file an ethics complaint over alleged harassment from a city councilman after police made separate arrests of the councilman's family members in January.



Chief James Browne

Browne told Councilman Joe Killingsworth at last week's Carbon Hill City Council meeting he would sue him if he harassed him, and would arrest him if he interfered with police investigations.



Joe Killingsworth

The police chief said after the meeting he has already contacted the Alabama State Ethics Commission. "I'm waiting on some opinions back from them before any formal complaints are filed," he said.

Killingsworth said he might take legal action against Browne, calling the chief "a lying son of a gun" who is waging "a vendetta" against him.

"If he (Browne) gets it in for you, he works it around and hurts you through your family," Killingsworth said.

Killingsworth confirmed that several members of his family have been arrested by the city's police department on various charges, including theft, promoting prison contraband, expired motorcycle tag and possession of what Killingsworth called "a little piece of crack cocaine."

He said one family member who "didn't have any money in the bank" wrote checks on another family member's account. The money has been paid back by the family member and no victims are pressing charges, "but he's pushing it anyway," Killingsworth

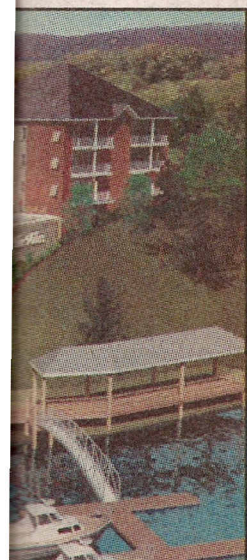
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He denied harassing Browne and said he is considering suing him.

Browne brought up the matter during the council meeting, saying he had made four arrests involving the councilman's family in January. He later said the arrests involved both misdemeanor and felony charges, although he did not elaborate.

"After each one of those arrests, (Killingsworth) comes to my office demanding these charges be dismissed and dropped," Browne said. "Because he didn't get his way and I didn't cave in, he's constantly harassing me."

The councilman has talked to others about firing Browne while sitting in the dispatch area, Browne told council members.

"I don't appreciate it. He needs to look at this ethics book, because he's clearly violating several of those" provisions, Browne said, holding up a book.

Browne then turned to Killingsworth.

"Mr. Killingsworth, if you harass me, I'm going to sue you. If you interfere with the police department, I'm going to arrest you," Browne said.

"How have I harassed you?" Killingsworth replied.

Browne said he was asking for Mayor Phillip Howard's help on the matter, trying to talk over Killingsworth. Browne eventually told Killingsworth he had nothing to say to him.

"I haven't been in your office in months," Killingsworth said, adding

Browne wouldn't talk to him.

"That's right, because I'm not going to cave in ... It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter," Browne replied.

"I've got nothing else to say to you," Killingsworth said.

After the meeting, Browne commented further on his charges.

"Obviously, (Killingsworth) was not happy with it. He came up demanding special treatment to lower the charges. It was totally inappropriate. He can't do that. That is a violation of the ethics laws," Browne said. "I felt totally uncomfortable."

The charges were later brought through municipal court, while a felony count was transferred to Walker County's courts. All the charges are still pending, Browne said. Killingsworth said it was the felony drug charge that was transferred.

"Since then it seems he has been personally attacking me and the police department on everything we do. He's got a complaint every time" the council meets, Browne said.

Written statements exist to show that Killingsworth has discussed the chief in the dispatch area, Browne said.

There "he has called me obscene names. He's going to fire me. He's going to terminate me," Browne said.

"That's uncalled for. Why? Because I'm doing my job. Ask any officer here. We treat everyone as equal as we can. Who they are, it doesn't matter. That's how it's got to be," he said.

Killingsworth has come to court on each charge and harassed Browne.

"He stood beside myself and the judge, like, 'Hey, I'm a council member, now do what I tell you to do,'" Browne said. "I thought that was totally wrong."

Killingsworth said at one court hearing, Browne was standing in the back of the room while Killingsworth was standing near the judge.

Browne said he is taking it personally and that Killingsworth has no need to get involved with the police business. "If he interferes with the police department or any investigation there, he's subject to being arrested just like anyone else," he said.

Killingsworth recently continued to deny going to Browne's office and denied trying to harass Browne there or in court.

On demanding special treatment to lower the charges, Killingsworth said Browne was "a lying son of a gun," later repeating the phrase when told about the alleged court harassment.

"That judge wouldn't put up with that," he said.

Killingsworth has made several recent complaints about the police department. He said the police have not filled out any of the forms that Killingsworth recently persuaded the council to require from officers to show where they go during the day. He said officers have told him he does not have the right to look at the log book.

He repeated past concerns about

being as many as five miles outside the police jurisdiction. Browne has said in the past that officers sometimes have to go outside the jurisdiction to catch up with speeders.

Killingsworth said he had a discussion about city business with a police officer at City Hall. Fifteen minutes after returning home, he got a call from a family member. The family member had just been arrested for possession of prison contraband, supposedly for trying to slip an item to another family member.

The councilman said the arrest was payback to him for telling officers to call in where they are at various times of the day, Killingsworth said.

"Of course, I can't tell them anything," he said. "I can suggest that we need to know where they are at. People from my district call me and say, 'We never see a policeman. We don't know where they are at.'"

The officers "say they don't want to call in because if they call in from the southside, crooks are waiting to break in on the northside," he said.

"He's got a vendetta against me because I guess he doesn't like evidently to be told what he needs to be doing," Killingsworth said.

On any comments in the dispatch area, Killingsworth said at least four council members are "unhappy" with Browne.

"They do want to get rid of him, because he's killing this town as far as I'm concerned. We've had some people say they wouldn't come through this town anymore because

of the harassment," Killingsworth said.

Killingsworth also complained Browne is patrolling on Future Interstate 22, where he said few local residents travel.

As for meeting with Browne, he said it is difficult to communicate with him.

"I haven't said anything to him. He won't talk to anybody," Killingsworth said, adding he has not been to Browne's office in the past 2 1/2 months. Killingsworth said he goes to the City Hall daily.

"You meet him in the hallway and he never speaks, he never looks — not at anybody he does. I always thought harassment, you had to say something or do something. I haven't even talked to him," he said.

He then added he did talk to Browne after the prison contraband charge, but did not mention the nature of the discussion.

Killingsworth said he stopped talking to Browne at Thursday's meeting "because I knew he was lying."

On the drug charge, Killingsworth said the authorities should be making more of an effort to go after the dealers.

"I don't know why in the heck they don't try to get the dealers. They get somebody with half of a marijuana cigarette and they've got a big drug bust," Killingsworth said. "They say, 'Well, if we've got the users, the sellers will dry up.' I don't like that attitude. If I'm selling you drugs, and they pick you up, I'm going to find me another customer."

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