

Former Martin County deputy sues department

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MARTIN COUNTY — A former Sheriff's deputy is suing his former agency for dozens of unauthorized accesses into his driver's license records, according to the federal suit filed Wednesday.

Spencer Udell, who served with the Martin County Sheriff's Office from 1999 to 2004, has named Sheriff William Snyder and 20 deputies in the lawsuit. Udell said between 2011 and 2013, the deputies accessed his driver's license information 40 times without having a legitimate reason. The state's Driver Privacy Protection Act limits the people who can access the driver's license database and the reasons why those people can obtain the information within.

Udell, 36, said the information has been used by deputies to harass him, such as a 2013 traffic stop made where he was charged with possession of a medication without a prescription. The charge was later dropped, according to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. Udell said the traffic stop and the arrest were part of the harassment effort by deputies.

Udell is also concerned that his Social Security number is in the wrong hands, which could effect his finances.

Udell worked in corrections, dispatch and as a reserve deputy in the patrol unit when he was employed with the Sheriff's Office.

The lawsuit is for \$100,000 for the database violations plus unspecified damages, according to his attorney, Stuart Address of Stuart.

Martin County Sheriff's Chief Deputy Glenn Theobald said the agency had not been served with the lawsuit as of Thursday, but had been given notice that it would be filed. Once it is received, the Sheriff's Office will question the deputies named in the suit and outside counsel will represent the agency in the litigation, Theobald said.

Several similar lawsuits have been filed by former law enforcement officials against the Sheriff's Office and other agencies on the Treasure Coast. Some police departments have entered into settlements with the plaintiffs, while others have not been resolved, according to federal court records.

"It's an epidemic problem nationwide," Address said Thursday.

Based on a conversation with his ex-wife, Udell said he was curious about whether his driver's license information was being accessed illegally. He ordered an audit from the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles to see how many times his information was looked at. Anyone can order an audit from the state and learn which agencies have looked at their driver's license file.

Udell received the report and found up to 48 cases where his records were accessed without cause between 2011 and 2013.

"You see the list and you start thinking 'Was I pulled over that day?' or 'What incident happened then?'" Udell said. "I was finding there was no reason for the intrusions. I was absolutely disgusted."

Driver's license records contain a person's address, telephone number, medical or disability details and emergency contacts.

According to the suit, Udell, who now works in retail security, alleges he was harassed because he was involved in a child custody battle with his ex-wife, who is married to one of the deputies named in the lawsuit.