

Federal case may be hurt by lawsuit

■ A Tampa detective's civil action contains information about a criminal investigation that should not be public, police officials say.

By CHRISTOPHER GOFFARD
Times Staff Writer

TAMPA — Veteran Tampa Detective Dale "Chip" DeBlock may have jeopardized a federal investigation by spilling sensitive details of the case in court papers, police said Thursday.

DeBlock is pursuing a lawsuit against Hillsborough State Attorney Mark Ober, claiming Ober harmed his career by questioning his credibility and declaring that prosecutors would not use DeBlock as a witness.

In papers filed last month, DeBlock

complained that Ober stymied his attempt to get a search warrant in a criminal case.

Authorities declined to give any details about the criminal case in question, except that federal investigators are looking into it and have executed a search warrant. But DeBlock was lead detective in the disappearance of Jason Galehouse, who vanished along with another 26-year-old gay man, Michael Wachholtz, from Hillsborough County in December 2003. Galehouse remains missing. Wachholtz turned up dead in January.

DeBlock's lawsuit says he obtained evidence in January that an unnamed suspect might be involved in the rape, kidnapping, torture and murder of homosexual men. DeBlock found evidence, the suit said, that the suspect may have drugged his victims.

Tampa police say details included in DeBlock's lawsuit may hurt investigators' chances of solving the case.

In May 2001, the state attorney announced he would no longer use DeBlock as a prosecution witness, saying he lacked credibility. DeBlock had secretly recorded conversations between prosecutors on the suspicion an assistant city attorney prosecuting massage parlors was actually protecting potential targets.

Since then, the Police Department has been shuffling DeBlock from one job to another. He was transferred from the criminal investigations bureau to auto theft, then to the missing persons unit, then to a desk job assessing tips on child abuse cases, and finally, earlier this month, to a job running traces on stolen guns.

DeBlock claims Ober's statement questioning his credibility has hindered his career.

DeBlock was working in missing persons when he came across the case he cited in his lawsuit, Tampa police said.

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