

Man's claim of beating in jail denied by police

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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A Mequon man who claims three Port Washington police officers beat him up Saturday picketed outside the Police Station Monday, but authorities deny the man's claim, saying he was unruly when they arrested him.

Bill Wisth said he was worried about the welfare of his son, whom he hadn't heard from in three to four days, when he called police to a south-side Port Washington apartment Saturday afternoon.

Officers spoke to his son and said the son didn't want to speak to him, Wisth said. He then asked the officer to collect \$750 from his son — money he said his son owed him — and police asked him to leave.

Wisth said he was waiting outside for a ride home when officers confronted him, pulled out a Taser and handcuffed him. They took him to the Police Station, then to the Ozaukee County jail, where Wisth said they threw him onto the hood of the squad car to search him, ripping his pants.

Inside the jail, he said, they slammed him into a window, kicked and punched him while two sheriff's deputies watched. They removed the handcuffs and released him in a cell.

Wisth said he plans to file a complaint with the Police and Fire Commission and sue the city and county.

Police Chief Kevin Hingiss disputed Wisth's claims, saying his officers acted professionally. "There's absolutely no truth or basis for a police brutality complaint," he said.

Hingiss confirmed officers were called for a welfare check on Wisth's son, but said the son told police that he had spoken to his father the previous day and didn't want anything to do with him.

Wisth told the officers he was going to stay there until he saw his son, threatening to "kick his son's (backside) and get his money," Hingiss said. Wisth was asked to leave, and when he didn't, he was arrested and placed in the squad car. He then started kicking the vehicle and threatening to break the window, Hingiss said.

Officers did not harm Wisth, Hingiss said.

Undersheriff Jim Johnson on Wednesday said a review of video and audio footage of Wisth's arrest and jailing — taken by cameras in the jail and body cameras worn by the Port police officers — shows that there was no undue force used.

"As far as we know, it's a false claim," he said. Officers and deputies did use a compliance hold, which he said is minimal force, to escort Wisth because he was uncooperative and went limp, Johnson said.

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Johnson, who said that his department had previously issued an alert on Wisth because of threats he has made, said Wisth tried to kick the Port squad car while at the jail.

Following department policy, Johnson said, the videos were reviewed by a use of force instructor and a lieutenant to ensure proper policies were followed.