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Probe of suspect drug busts widens

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A police investigation into allegations that a narcotics cop and his informant lied about drug buys so the officer could get search warrants has expanded to other officers and informants, a high-ranking police official said yesterday. "The investigation includes everyone who made an arrest with [Officer Jeffrey] Cujdik and any other informant who worked with him," the official said.

At least six other police-paid informants worked with Cujdik.

Mayor Nutter, Police Commissioner Charles Ramsey and FBI Special Agent in Charge Janice Fedarczyk scheduled a news conference today to discuss the investigation.

The *Daily News* on Monday chronicled the relationship between Cujdik and his longtime informant, Ventura Martinez.

In an exclusive interview, Martinez said Cujdik sometimes ordered him to buy drugs elsewhere when he was unable to make a buy from a targeted drug house. Cujdik then lied in search-warrant applications, saying he had witnessed Martinez purchase the drugs from the targeted house, Martinez said.

Cujdik, through his attorney, George Bochetto, has denied the allegations. Bochetto called the claims "fiction" — based on "professional liars, felons, and drug addicts."

As the investigation widened,

prosecutors yesterday were forced to delay the scheduled trial of an alleged big-time drug dealer who was arrested by Cujdik and another officer last June.

That trial and at least four other pending criminal cases have been put on hold since the *Daily News* story broke, according to public defender Bradley S. Bridge.

The number of questionable cases could be staggering.

"I would assume that the examination of the cases involving Officer Cujdik and his partners will total in the hundreds," said Bridge, of the Defender Association of Philadelphia.

"I know that the officers were very busy testifying and getting overtime on a regular basis," he said.

Cujdik, a 12-year veteran, has been one of the busiest narcotics cops on the force. In 2007, he

made nearly \$50,000 in overtime on top of his \$55,389 yearly salary, city payroll records show.

The Police Department pays confidential informants to make drug buys and for tips leading to drug and gun arrests.

Martinez alleged that he had given Cujdik more than \$20,000 in informant cash to rent a Kensington house that Cujdik owned.

Martinez and his family lived in the house from September 2005 to Jan. 30, documents and court testimony show. The lease agreement violated police rules that require cops to keep an arms-length relationship with informants.

Besides police Internal Affairs, the FBI and the district attorney are investigating Martinez's allegations. Last month, police took Cujdik's service pistol from him

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DRUG

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and placed him on desk duty.

No other officer in the Narcotics Field Unit has been placed on desk duty, the police source said. About 115 active officers are in the field unit and nine in Squad 9 where Cujdik worked.

Yesterday morning, Cujdik arrived at Courtroom 808 of the Criminal Justice Center. He was prepared to testify in the trial of Jose Torres, 36, who is facing drug and weapons charges.

Assistant District Attorney Jennifer Hoffman asked the judge to postpone the case "for further investigation."

Torres' public defender, Peter Maas, said the D.A.'s office has to decide how to proceed with cases involving Cujdik and Martinez.

"Anything that involves Cujdik and [Martinez] is now, on its base, suspect," Maas said. "It's a question of have the laws been broken? You have to hold everyone to the law because the same law that protects him [Torres] protects you and me."

Cujdik and another narcotics officer, Robert McDonnell, arrested Torres after executing a search warrant at his Northeast Philly home last June.

In court testimony and in a search-warrant application, McDonnell said he and Cujdik had seen Martinez make three \$20 buys of marijuana from Torres between May 27 and June 17.

But both Martinez and Torres claim that never happened.

Martinez told the *Daily News* that he had tried three times to buy marijuana from Torres, but Torres wouldn't sell to him.

"That man never sold nothing to me at all," Martinez said.

In all three instances, Cujdik instructed Martinez to buy marijuana elsewhere, Martinez alleged. So Martinez bought weed around the corner from Torres' Atlantic Street home, he said.

McDonnell, a veteran narcotics cop, declined to comment yesterday.

day.

During the subsequent search of Torres' home and car, police found cash, a gun, drug paraphernalia, and packets of marijuana, cocaine and 18 Xanax pills, according to McDonnell's testimony at a Nov. 7 preliminary hearing.

Torres, a diabetic single father of two school-age daughters, admits he has a storied past. Court records show that he has been arrested on a host of drug and assault charges dating from 1991 and that he's served time in state and county prison.

But Torres claimed yesterday that he has walked a "straight line" for his daughters since gaining custody of them in 2007. He said he was shocked when he first heard of the allegations against him at his preliminary hearing.

"I thought they got the wrong case or the wrong person because it's all lies," Torres said. ★

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