

ALL, \$60 million suit filed against state police

Convicted drug dealer charges he was falsely arrested for murder

By Jeanne Curran
Of the NEWS Staff

A Waldo County man once charged with murder and arson filed a \$60 million lawsuit Wednesday in U.S. District Court in Bangor against the Maine State Police and three state police officers, alleging he was falsely arrested.

Richard Sargent, who said he had "gone underground" out of fear of retribution from the state police and from a cocaine dealer, filed a handwritten complaint seeking compensatory and punitive damages for false arrest, mental anguish, and defamation of character.

In his complaint, Sargent named the state police and Detective Sgt. Herbert "Barry" Shuman, Lt. Ralph Pinkham, and former Sgt. Michael Pratt as defendants in the civil suit.

"Knowing that the charges were false and acting with malice, they did deprive me of my civil rights and freedom," wrote Sargent.

Sargent is seeking a total of \$40 million for the false arrests, \$10 million for mental anguish, and \$10 million for defamation of character. Representing himself, he has sought indigent status from the federal court. He said he may be represented by a Bangor attorney at a later date.

"I've been waiting a long time for this," he said, while standing in the U.S. District Court clerk's office.

Reviews for nursing exam scheduled

Two weeklong reviews to prepare June 8-12. A second session will be

Sargent said he was "trying to show there was a conspiracy in the state police to frame me for murder, acting recklessly with malice and violating my civil rights to deprive me of my freedom."

Commenting about the lawsuit, Col. Andrew E. Demers Jr., chief of the Maine State Police, said, "First I've heard of it — (it wasn't anticipated."

Sargent, who has previous convictions for selling drugs, armed robbery, and kidnapping while armed, was charged with the 1981 murder of Michael Cochran, who died in a cabin fire in Lucerne.

The murder and arson charges later were dismissed after the chief witness in the case, Sharon Sargent Worster, the former sister-in-law of Richard Sargent, admitted she had perjured herself. No one has been convicted of the murder.

Last month, drug charges brought against Sargent, his sister, and his mother were dismissed by a Superior Court justice, who said the case had been tainted by state police misconduct.

Sargent is also appealing a 1986 armed robbery conviction arising from the robbery of an East Corinth drug dealer.

In May, Justice Donald Alexander determined that the drug case brought against Sargent and his relatives had been adversely affected by Pratt's lying about his sexual re-

lationship with Worster, who also had been an informant in the case.

Pratt was dismissed from the Maine State Police in April "for violating rules, and regulations," according to an announcement issued by the state agency. The fired officer still is seeking reinstatement through grievance proceedings and is expected to appear before the state Employee Relations Board in June, said Demers.

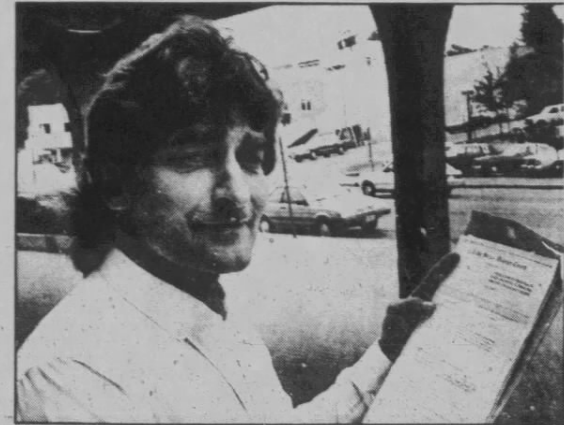
An investigation into possible state criminal charges against Pratt is "in the same pending status" that it has been for several months, according to Charles Leadbetter, assistant

attorney general. He said the lawsuit "wouldn't have any effect on this matter relative to the role this office would play."

Sargent said that through the lawsuit he hoped "to see that Michael Cochran's murderer is brought to justice."

"I think this is going to start the ball rolling," he said. "This'll wake them up a bit."

Sargent said he was in hiding within the state. "The state police would like to see me out of the way," he said. "I've caused them a lot of embarrassment, and I'm going to cause them a lot more embarrassment."



RICHARD SARGENT files his lawsuit in Bangor's District Court Wednesday. (NEWS Photo by Carroll Hall)

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