

# Oakland schools' top cop quits over slurs

## OAKLAND SCHOOLS

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Pete Sarna, Oakland Schools Police Chief

**OAKLAND** -- The Oakland school district's police chief, accused of aiming racist remarks at an African American sergeant during a drunken outburst after a charity golf tournament, resigned from the department Wednesday.

The departure of **Pete Sarna**, 41, from the force he led for two years also means the end of an investigation that the Oakland Unified School District began earlier this month into his alleged comments, said district spokesman **Troy Flint**.

Sarna is also retiring from law enforcement after serving previous stints with the **Oakland Police Department** and the state **Department of Justice**, and has entered an alcohol rehabilitation program, said his attorney, **Alison Berry Wilkinson**, who responded to The Chronicle's request for comment from the former police chief.

"I am deeply sorry for the pain my actions have caused," Sarna wrote in a letter Wednesday to **Oakland school board**

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President **Gary Yee**. "My words hurt not only those who heard them, but also the entire community I have tried to serve as police chief of the Oakland Unified School District."

Sarna said his focus would be on "repairing the pain I have caused to my family and on my recovery and sobriety. I make no excuses for my behavior and offer no explanations. There simply is no excuse for the hurtful words I used and no explanation for behavior so at odds with whom I believe myself to be."

## Drank 'to excess'

Sarna was cited in 2007 for drunken driving, and Wilkinson confirmed that the former chief drank "to excess" at the July 18 charity golf tournament at the **Sequoiah Country Club** in Oakland.

Wilkinson said she didn't know how much alcohol Sarna had consumed, but "it was definitely more than he should have."

Sarna oversaw a dozen officers as head of the school district's police force, which patrols 100 campuses.

The district had placed Sarna on administrative leave as it investigated allegations that he had let loose with a half-hour tirade loaded with racist epithets while being driven home from the golf tournament.

Sarna, who is white, allegedly made the comments in the presence of the African American sergeant, a second sergeant and a police driver who was apparently called to the golf course so no one would be driving drunk, sources said.

## Racist outburst

As the group was headed home through the Caldecott Tunnel, Sarna allegedly told the African American sergeant, who lives in Orinda, that "the only good n- is a dead n- and they should hang you in the town square to prevent any other n- from coming in the area."

The outbursts continued when they reached the home of another sergeant, Jonathan Bellusa, where Sarna directed insults at his colleague's children, said Bellusa's attorney, **Joe O'Sullivan**.

Sarna directed more slurs at an Asian American officer as he was being driven to his home, O'Sullivan said.

Bellusa, who is white, filed a complaint against Sarna with the district.

O'Sullivan said it would have been "untenable" for Sarna to remain as the district's police chief. "It was virulent, and it was violent. It was incendiary," O'Sullivan said of Sarna's alleged comments.

"There had been no colloquy that preceded it - it shows instability on his part," O'Sullivan said. "The alcohol was the vehicle for it to come out. You can't use that type of explosive and divisive language and survive."

## 2007 incident

It is not the first controversy involving Sarna, who left the Oakland Police Department after being hired in January 2007 by then-Attorney General **Jerry Brown** as deputy director of the Justice Department's Division of Law Enforcement, overseeing numerous investigators and criminalists.

Sarna resigned just seven months later after crashing his state-owned Chevrolet Tahoe into a tow truck on Highway 24 and was cited for misdemeanor drunken driving.

He was named police chief of the Oakland schools in June 2009.

O'Sullivan said the cash-strapped district had given Sarna and the two sergeants a full-day's pay to play in the charity golf tournament, in what Sarna looked upon as a "bonding thing." "It was a work day," O'Sullivan said.

Flint, the district spokesman, said it was not clear whether the district had paid for the officers' \$150-a-head entrance fees, as Sarna managed his own budget.

"We have people pulling time sheets" to determine if the officers listed the day as work, vacation or a personal day, Flint said.

The school police force will be led on an interim basis by Sgt. **Barhin Bhatt**, who shot and killed a man outside a school dance in January after the suspect stabbed another sergeant - Bellusa - with a screwdriver.

E-mail **Henry K. Lee** at [hlee@sfchronicle.com](mailto:hlee@sfchronicle.com).

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