

EXCLUSIVE: Milwaukee Misses Out On \$15 Million Federal Grant Because Police Department Didn't Submit Application On Time

By Mark Belling, WISN-AM

Top aides to Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson admit "an unacceptable screw-up" led to the city missing out on a \$15 million federal grant to increase funding for the police department.

The city's application for funds under the federal COPS Act was rejected because a grant administrator for the Milwaukee Police Department didn't submit the application on time. Nick DeSiato, chief of staff to Mayor Johnson, and Jeff Fleming, the mayor's spokesman, both acknowledge the error was an unacceptable mistake. They are not naming the civilian police employee because he is now the subject of a disciplinary procedure.

Fleming and DeSiato tell me the grant application was submitted two hours before the deadline this summer but the application had technical errors and kept getting rejected. The deadline passed without the US Justice Department receiving a valid application from Milwaukee.

Fleming and DeSiato say the city appealed the rejection to the Justice Department and received assistance from members of the state's congressional delegation but the feds would not reverse the rejection. Fleming said Mayor Johnson is very upset with the foul-up. He indicated Police Chief Jeffrey Norman is also very unhappy the application was botched.

However, both mayoral aides say the city would ultimately not have been able to use the funds to add police officers. The new state law, Act 12, that gave the city the ability to create a two percent city sales tax eliminated the city's ability to use federal COPS Act funding to hire more officers.

But both Fleming and DeSiato say the city didn't know that at the time the grant application was to be submitted. A Milwaukee Journal Sentinel story this week reported the city did not seek the federal funds because they couldn't be used to hire more cops. That story was entirely inaccurate. Both Fleming and DeSiato say the grant was not sought because of the disastrous failure to submit the grant application on time. They both say it was simply "luck" that the city would have ended up unable to use the money. The grant application was due before Act 12 was passed.

The Police Department grant administrator is described as a veteran with years of experience. City officials say the administrator has submitted many applications in the past and may have let this one slide because of over-confidence it could successfully submitted at the last minute. DeSiato says even if the \$15 million application had been submitted correctly and on time, there was only a 50 percent chance Milwaukee would have been one of the cities awarded money.

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