

# The Progress-Index

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## NEWS

# State Police looking into allegations of 'inappropriate' behavior by Heights police chief



**Bill Atkinson**

The Progress-Index

Published 5:43 p.m. ET March 3, 2022 | Updated 6:23 p.m. ET March 3, 2022

COLONIAL HEIGHTS — The Virginia State Police said Thursday it now is looking into reports of "inappropriate behavior and interactions" involving the city's police chief now on administrative leave.

VSP spokesperson Corinne Geller confirmed the department's Bureau of Criminal Investigations has initiated a probe into the allegations against Police Chief Jeff Faries "at the request of city leadership." The investigation, according to Geller, is focused on what it called actions in an "off-duty capacity," meaning it had nothing to do with police.

It was not immediately clear what that off-duty capacity was.

Early Wednesday night, Colonial Heights City Manager Douglas Smith wrote a one-line email to all city department heads informing them that Faries had been placed on administrative leave by the city for an undisclosed reason. Faries, Smith wrote, would stay on leave "until further notice."

The email did not mention the state police investigation.

In a message, Colonial Heights Mayor Greg Kochuba declined to comment on the issue citing it as a personnel matter.

In Faries' absence, the daily operations of the police department will be overseen by its second-in-command, Major Rob Ruxer.

Faries has been with the Colonial Heights Police Department since 1989 and its chief since 2006. Ruxer came to Colonial Heights from Petersburg in 2002.

In an email to the police department, Ruxer said Faries was no longer allowed on police property without contacting the acting chief beforehand. He also asked his colleagues to remember the mission of the department and to not let the issue be a distraction.

"I am confident we can work through this together and provide the level of service this community is accustomed to," Ruxer wrote in the email.

"Our agency will continue to serve and protect our community."

Stay with [progress-index.com](http://progress-index.com) for details as they become available.

*Bill Atkinson (he/him/his) is daily news coach for USA TODAY's Southeast Region-Unified Central, which includes Virginia, West Virginia and central North Carolina. He is based in Petersburg, Virginia. Reach him at [batkinson@progress-index.com](mailto:batkinson@progress-index.com).*

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## NEWS

# Colonial Heights police chief retires; investigation into 'inappropriate' behavior continues

*Jeff Faries tells the city in an email that his last official day with the city was March 31, almost a month after he was placed on administrative leave over the allegations*



**Bill Atkinson**

The Progress-Index

Published 10:11 p.m. ET April 6, 2022 | Updated 12:06 p.m. ET April 7, 2022

COLONIAL HEIGHTS — Police Chief Jeff Faries' decision to retire apparently will not affect the Virginia State Police's investigation of him amid claims of improper off-duty behavior.

Faries, who has been on administrative leave from his post since March 2, told City Manager Douglas Smith in an email of his plans to step down, Smith said Wednesday night. The effective date of his retirement was March 31.

"Investigation remains ongoing," VSP spokesperson Corinne Geller said in a text message Wednesday night. "Nothing new to release."

Faries, a Colonial Heights cop since 1989 and the department's chief since 2006, is being investigated for what the VSP said was "inappropriate behavior and interactions" that were unrelated to police work. The exact reason for the investigation has not been disclosed, but VSP said it was conducting the probe at the request of city leadership.

**More:** State Police looking into allegations of 'inappropriate' behavior by Heights police chief

At the time his leave was reported, Faries had resigned his position as coach of the Colonial Heights High School girls' softball team.

"Thank you to Chief Faries for [your] many years of service to the City of Colonial Heights," Smith wrote in an email statement to The Progress-Index.

In a short message to The Progress-Index, Faries confirmed his retirement.

Major Robert Ruxer, the second-in-command at the department, has been serving as interim police chief since Faries went on leave. At the time, Smith said the leave was "until further notice," and Ruxer informed the department in an email that Faries was not permitted to be in police headquarters without informing Ruxer first.

**More from The Progress-Index:** Hopewell Police identify suspected Wawa shooter, ask for public's help in locating him

**More from The Progress-Index:** Richmond-based commercial tire business expands: 'Petersburg has shown us nothing but love'

*Bill Atkinson (he/him/his) is a journalist and daily news coach for USA TODAY' Network's Atlantic Region which includes Virginia. He is based in Petersburg, Virginia. Reach him at [batkinson@progress-index.com](mailto:batkinson@progress-index.com).*

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## NEWS

# Sroufe: System acted 'promptly and appropriately' on claims against former softball coach

*The superintendent dismissed claims by a former assistant coach that the administration ignored her letter outlining complaints about the behavior of Jeff Faries, who was also the city's police chief*



**Bill Atkinson**

The Progress-Index

Published 12:30 a.m. ET Dec. 24, 2022 | Updated 1:02 a.m. ET Dec. 24, 2022

COLONIAL HEIGHTS — School Superintendent Dr. William Sroufe said the school system handled its investigation into alleged improper behavior by one of the high school coaches who also was the Colonial Heights police chief "promptly and appropriately," and called accusations of a cover-up "inaccurate."

In an email to The Progress-Index Friday night, Sroufe also denied the existence of a letter reportedly sent by an assistant softball coach on the complaints against Jeff Faries, saying there was "no record" of one in the school files. He also claimed the Virginia State Police had already investigated the allegations against Faries and found no evidence of any attempts to cover them up.

The school chief's comments — his first public statements about the Faries issue since news broke about the allegations earlier this year — came after a state legislator sent a letter Thursday to VSP asking for an investigation into how the school system handled the Faries case. Del. Mike Cherry, R-Colonial Heights, said he asked the state police to intervene out of concern that parents' trust in the school system had begun eroding amid the back-and-forth over Faries.

**More:** State police asked to investigate reported cover-up of former police chief and softball coach's behavior

Faries was placed on administrative leave last April after allegations arose that while serving as the Colonial Heights High School girls' softball coach, he had initiated inappropriate

contact with some of his players. By the time those accusations came to light, he already had resigned as the team's coach.

The state police investigated the allegations and turned their findings over to Lynchburg commonwealth's attorney Bethany Harrison, who had been appointed special prosecutor for the case. Harrison concluded that misdemeanor charges were warranted, but she could not file charges because the statute of limitations for them had expired.

Earlier this month, Richmond television station WTVR reported that one of Faries' former assistants had sent a letter to the school system claiming that he had acted inappropriately with her and she saw him do the same with other team members during the spring of 2021. However, Alicia Allen told the TV station that the letter "was brushed under the rug" by the school system.

"Recent allegations that the school system has engaged in a cover up regarding former softball coach Jeff Faries are disappointing and inaccurate," Sroufe said in the email to The Progress-Index. "Colonial Heights Public Schools takes all complaints of inappropriate or unprofessional behavior very seriously. Concerns regarding Mr. Faries were investigated and addressed promptly and appropriately by school staff."

However, a letter from Harrison to a Colonial Heights city councilor last September appears to dispute that. In the letter, the prosecutor wrote that "because of the delay in reporting these matters to law enforcement for a criminal investigation, we are beyond the statute of limitations to charge the applicable misdemeanors from these events."

Addressing Allen's letter, Sroufe wrote, "[A] thorough review of the school system's electronic records was conducted and there is no record of any such letter being sent or received."

Sroufe said the school system cooperated with the state police's initial investigation. "To our knowledge, neither the Virginia State Police, nor the special prosecutor found any wrongdoing or cover up by school staff," he wrote in the email.

It was immediately unclear if that initial investigation addressed any cover-up issues.

A state police spokesperson said Thursday that VSP superintendent Col. Gary Settle "is reviewing [Cherry's] request for an investigation." State government currently is closed for the Christmas holiday until Dec. 27, so any decision likely would not come before that.

A month after Faries was placed on leave by the city, he was allowed to retire from the department. Thus far, he has not publicly commented on the accusations.

*Bill Atkinson (he/him/his) is an award-winning journalist who covers breaking news, government and politics. Reach him at [batkinson@progress-index.com](mailto:batkinson@progress-index.com) or on Twitter at [@BAtkinson\\_PI](https://twitter.com/BAtkinson_PI).*