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Williamson sheriff faces more charges

Grand jury cites 'official misconduct'

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FRANKLIN — Williamson County Sheriff Ricky Headley — accused earlier this year in Nashville of obtaining painkillers without a prescription — now faces criminal charges on his home turf.

A Williamson County grand jury indicted Headley on Monday morning on four counts of official misconduct stemming from the earlier charges. He was arrested by Tennessee Bureau of Investigation agents and taken to the county jail.

Headley, 43, was released after posting \$5,000 bail. He did not return calls for comment, and officials at the Sheriff's Office declined to speak with a reporter.

The sheriff's new attorney, Nashville lawyer David Raybin, said the new charges may be a case of double jeopardy.

"It seems to me that they are coming at him with the same thing, charging him twice with the same crime," Raybin said.

"We will, however, contest the charges, and Sheriff Headley has no intention of resigning over this."

Headley was arrested in Nashville in January after being accused of obtaining large numbers of Lortab and other painkillers without a prescription.

Headley could serve time

According to the indictment, Headley was in uniform and driving an unmarked police car with "Sheriff" on the license plate when he illegally obtained the drugs, which constitutes official misconduct. The drug case has yet to come before a grand jury in Davidson County, where Headley faces two charges — one felony and one misdemeanor count of obtaining drugs by fraud. Those charges were bound over to a grand jury by a Davidson County judge in April.

Official misconduct is a class E felony, punishable by up to two years of incarceration. If Headley is convicted of a felony, he could lose his position as sheriff. He could remain in office if he's convicted of misdemeanor charges. Yarbrough has stated that Headley might consider pleading guilty to a misdemeanor offense.

Some call for his removal

Several county residents and two police chiefs have called for Headley's ouster. Neither Williamson County commissioners nor the county mayor have the power to remove him from the elected position of sheriff. A felony conviction could result in his removal from office, however. "I'm extremely pleased that the District Attorney's Office has moved forward to obtain the indictments against Ricky Headley," said Franklin Police Chief Jackie Moore. "I think the law enforcement offices in this county have been vindicated by these indictments."

Williamson County Deputy District Attorney Derek Smith said he had to wait until the TBI had completed its investigation before he presented the charges to a grand jury. Smith would not elaborate on the charges or allegations.

Sheriff got counseling

Headley was arrested Jan. 31, at the conclusion of a two-year investigation of Brooks Pharmacy by the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation and the Metro police department. Warrants charge that Headley picked up at least 1,900 Lortab pills from the pharmacy between Oct. 2, 2006, and Jan. 20, 2007. Investigators also say that Headley illegally obtained Soma, a muscle relaxant.

Headley has admitted to having the drugs without a prescription, a misdemeanor. He's said that he developed an addiction to painkillers because of back problems. He took a leave of absence to attend a drug counseling clinic after his arrest but returned to work in February.

Investigators said a confidential informant working at the pharmacy told them that Headley and his secretary, Michelle Corley, would pick up the medication at the pharmacy and call in for pills.

Headley is in his second term as sheriff. He was re-elected by a 4 to 1 margin, beating challenger Darrell Cagle in 2006. His term would expire in 2010.

Headley is scheduled to go before a judge for arraignment on Oct. 22.