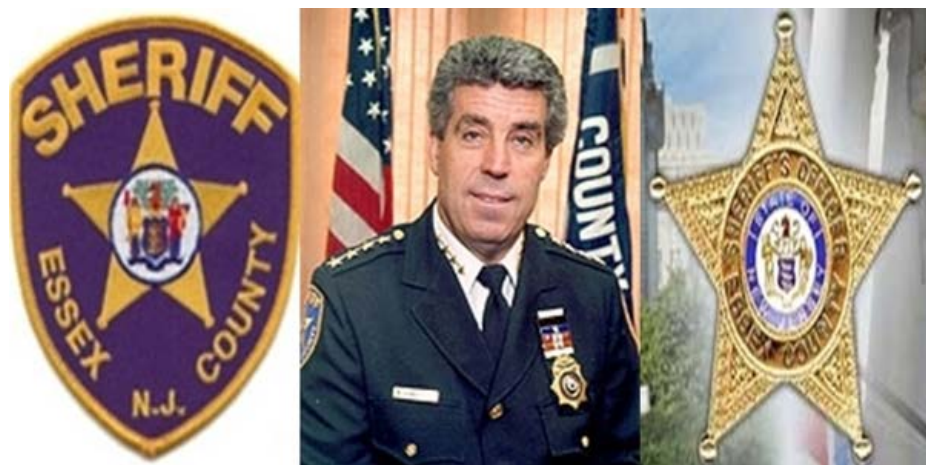


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## RETIRED, RE-HIRED & RICH: ESSEX SHERIFF GAMES \$1M FROM PENSION; ONE OF 17 NJ SHERIFFS DOUBLE-DIPPING FROM PUBLIC FUNDS Investigative Report by Mark Lagerkvist

Posted On October 15, 2012



TRENTON — Without actually retiring, Essex County Sheriff Armando Fontoura has pocketed more than a million dollars in retirement pay at the expense of New Jersey’s pension system.

It’s a double whammy for taxpayers and state pension funds. Fontoura rakes in \$200,305 a year. He receives [\\$62,388 in pension as a retired Essex undersheriff](#), while he collects his \$137,917 salary as Essex sheriff.

The sheriff has been double-dipping for 22 years. If he is re-elected next month, [Fontoura’s pension jackpot payouts would hit \\$1.38 million](#) by the time his term expires at the end of 2015.

“Does it look bad? Yes,” responded Fontoura. “No question about it, it looks bad. Was it legal? Yes.”

Fontoura is one of a growing number of public officials, who benefit from loopholes in pension law that allow them to turn the state retirement system into their own winning lottery ticket.

A New Jersey Watchdog investigation found that [17 of the state’s 21 county sheriffs, or 80 percent, are double-dipping](#). Collectively, those sheriffs receive \$3.37 million a year — \$1.22 million in pensions plus salaries totaling nearly \$2.15 million. The 16 other double-dippers are:

- Bergen County Sheriff Michael Saudino, \$267,984 — \$138,000 salary and [\\$129,984 pension](#);
- Passaic County Sheriff Richard Berdnik, \$253,947 — \$151,887 salary and [\\$102,060 pension](#);
- Union County Sheriff Ralph Froehlich, \$228,024 — \$142,728 salary and [\\$85,296 pension](#);
- Camden County Sheriff Charles Billingham, \$219,141 — \$144,753 salary and [\\$74,388 pension](#);
- Mercer County Sheriff John Kemler, \$219,108 — \$134,280 salary and [\\$84,828 pension](#);

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- Warren County Sheriff David Gallant, \$206,464 — \$124,084 salary and **\$82,380 pension**;
- Somerset County Sheriff Frank Provenzano, \$200,834 — \$124,910 salary and **\$75,924 pension**;
- Gloucester County Sheriff Carmel Morina, \$191,907 — \$128,547 salary and **\$63,360 pension**;
- Middlesex County Sheriff Mildred Scott, \$191,198 — \$129,950 salary and **\$61,248 pension**;
- Morris County Sheriff Edward Rochford, \$191,088 — \$129,636 salary and **\$61,452 pension**;
- Hunterdon County Sheriff Frederick Brown, \$191,013 — \$109,185 salary and **\$81,828 pension**;
- Salem County Sheriff Charles Miller, \$183,222 — \$107,250 salary and **\$75,972 pension**;
- Cumberland County Sheriff Robert Austino, \$166,854 — \$107,250 salary and **\$59,604 pension**;
- Ocean County Sheriff William Polhemus, \$165,941 — \$122,669 salary and **\$43,272 pension**;
- Cape May County Sheriff Gary Schaffer, \$161,572 — \$107,500 salary and **\$54,072 pension**;
- Sussex County Sheriff Michael Strada, \$135,642 — \$107,250 salary and **\$28,392 pension**.

Among double-dipping sheriffs, no one has raked in more retirement pay than Fontoura.

At age 47, Fontoura “retired” — but he never left Essex County’s payroll. [According to county records](#), Fontoura’s last day as undersheriff was Aug. 31, 1990. Then he returned to work three days later as sheriff’s chief officer — a different job title at the same salary.

Fontoura told [NBC 4 New York](#) — which cooperated with New Jersey Watchdog in producing this report — that he had expected to take a job in the private sector. During the weekend after he retired, county officials, Democratic leaders and family members convinced him to stay, Fontoura said.

“I said, as long as I can do this legally without breaking any law — and I can collect my pension and augment this with a salary, that’s fine, I will do this,” said Fontoura in an interview with reporter Chris Glorioso, of NBC 4.

However, [county records](#) show the retiring and rehiring of Fontoura was planned in advance. Then-Sheriff Thomas D’Alessio signed the paperwork approving the switch on Aug. 7, 1990, more than three weeks before Fontoura retired.

“I didn’t do anything illegal,” said Fontoura. “My motivation was to take care of my family the best way I possibly could. Fairness begins at home. You have to be fair to your family.”

After D’Alessio was elected county executive, Fontoura was appointed sheriff in 1991 — a job he has held since. So far, he has received **\$1.14 million in retirement checks**.

“I retired, I collect my pension and I’m your sheriff,” said Fontoura, who is running for his eighth term in office.

No matter how next month’s election turns out, Essex County will have a double-dipper in the sheriff’s office.

Orlando Mendez — Fontoura’s Republican opponent — is a retired Essex sheriff’s officer, who draws a **\$43,848 a year pension**.

In the Democratic primary in June, Fontoura defeated three law enforcement retirees — Roger Terry, John Arnold and Herman Rivera. Terry, deputy mayor of Montclair, gets a **\$100,980 a year pension** as a retired township deputy police chief. Arnold, a retired Essex prosecutor’s detective, and Rivera, a retired Essex sheriff’s detective, receive annual pensions of **\$56,148** and **\$49,248**, respectively.

Double-dipping is a bipartisan practice in New Jersey. Nine Republican and eight Democratic sheriffs collect public pensions plus paychecks.

Froehlich, Kemler, Scott, Miller and Fontoura retired from the same county governments, where they now serve as sheriffs. Gallant is a State Police retiree. The other 11 double-dipping



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