

# NEW JERSEY WATCHDOG.ORG

HOME BEWARE OF WATCHDOG BIG STORIES FEED US TIPS USE OUR NEWS SUBSCRIBE CONTRIBUTE RSS

## TAXPAYER TRAUMA! HOW NJ COPS 'CLEAN UP' ON DISABILITY PENSIONS Investigative Report by Mark Lagerkvist Posted On January 31, 2013



Timothy Carroll retired at age 33. He claimed he was “totally and permanently” disabled by the trauma of seeing dead bodies while working as a sheriff’s officer in Morris County, New Jersey.

“I suffer from crime scene flashbacks and hallucinations due to all the years I served as a crime scene detective,” stated Carroll in his [disability application](#).

The real shock is Carroll then started a business that cleans up gory crime scenes, a New Jersey Watchdog investigation found. Yet the state continues to pay him a disability pension for life, a sum that could total \$1 million or more.

Carroll’s company – [Tragic Solutions LLC](#), of Linden – specializes in removing human residue from “bloody and/or messy” scenes, including “murder, suicide, accidental, natural and decomposing deaths,” [according to its web site](#). He formed the business with Thomas Rohling, another former Morris sheriff’s officer who draws a state disability pension.

“I really don’t want to comment on this,” Carroll told [NBC 4 New York](#), New Jersey Watchdog’s partner on the investigation.

“This says there is a problem with the whole pension system, the way the whole system is set up,” said John Sierchio, a trustee of the state Police and Firemen’s Retirement System. PFRS paid out \$175 million to 5,067 disabled retirees in 2011 – figures expected to rise when 2012 data are released.

Disability applications received by the PFRS have doubled in the past year – and 95 percent of those claims are questionable, according to Sierchio.

The supposedly career-ending incidents have included a fireman who fell out of bed while sleeping, an officer who fell off his chair while sitting down, cops who slipped on wet floors or icy sidewalks, and a patrolman who suffered emotional trauma because his lieutenant yelled at him during roll call.

“It’s people who don’t want to work anymore,” said Sierchio, a Bloomfield police sergeant who has served on the PFRS board since 2002. “The last two officers shot in New Jersey are back to work, but the guy who trips over a curb is sitting on a beach getting two-thirds (of salary) tax-free.”

RUN WITH US




GET CONNECTED

### THE JUICY TIDBITS

[WATCH NBC 4 NEW YORK'S STORY ON NJ WATCHDOG'S DISABILITY PENSION INVESTIGATION](#)

[WHAT GOV. CHRISTIE WON'T TELL YOU IN 'STATE OF STATE' SPEECH News Analysis by Mark Lagerkvist](#)

[TOO HOT TO HANDLE? NJ RECORDS COUNCIL QUILTS GUADAGNO CASE Report by Mark Lagerkvist](#)

[SEE NBC 4 NEW YORK'S STORY ON NJ WATCHDOG'S INVESTIGATION OF DOUBLE-DIPPING SHERIFFS](#)

[51 TOP COUNTY COPS DOUBLE-DIP \\$9M/YR IN PENSIONS & SALARIES Investigative Report by Mark Lagerkvist](#)

[MORE THAN 1,200 NJ STATE RETIREES GET \\$100K PENSIONS Investigative Report by Mark Lagerkvist](#)

[SIXTY NJ STATE 'DOUBLE-DIPPERS' COLLECT \\$10 MILLION A YEAR: ONE-THIRD HIRED UNDER CHRISTIE Report by Mark Lagerkvist](#)

[OUT OF COMPTROL: STATE WATCHDOG HIRES 'DOUBLE-DIPPERS' TO INVESTIGATE WASTE IN NJ GOVERNMENT Investigative Report by Mark Lagerkvist](#)

Lagerkvist

In New Jersey, it's relatively easy to fake or exaggerate an injury to get a disability pension. The PFRS has no staff to investigate fraud. Nor do any of the state's five other retirement funds for public employees.

"No one is watching," said Sierchio.

The Tragic Solutions case illustrates how weak laws, red tape and lack of enforcement contribute to the woes of a state pension system that faces a [shortfall of nearly \\$42 billion](#). New Jersey Watchdog obtained the records through Open Public Records Act requests.

In 1999, Carroll told pension officials he was unable to work because of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression caused by what he witnessed while responding to a car accident and three suicides.

"I started having crime scene flashbacks and hallucinations in 1997," wrote Carroll. "In September of 1998, I suffered a hallucination while working at the courthouse. I was removed from work and placed in a mental hospital."

Carroll began receiving disability checks after the PFRS board approved his retirement effective May 1999. Five years later – in April 2004 – Carroll and Rohling formed Tragic Solutions, [according to state business records](#). For Carroll, the timing would prove crucial.

Tragic Solutions was featured later that year in an [Associated Press story](#) on businesses that clean up crime scenes. It included an AP [photo \(above\)](#) of Carroll (left) and Rohling (right) posing in biohazard protection suits they wore on the job. The AP article mentioned they were retired cops, but nothing about their disability pensions.

After the PFRS board learned of Tragic Solutions, it could not halt Carroll's disability benefits, currently [\\$25,284 a year](#) plus health coverage.

"In the performance of your job responsibilities with Tragic Solutions, you are exposed to crime scenes similar to those you were subjected to during your employment with Morris County as a crime scene investigator and upon which you were found disabled," a [state official scolded Carroll in a 2005 letter](#).

"Although there will be no action taken at this time, the facts surrounding your post-retirement employment with Tragic Solutions will become part of your pension membership file," the correspondence concluded.

The law prevented PFRS from doing anything more. Under pension rules, there is a five-year limit on the state's right to re-examine disability retirees to determine if they are able to return to work. Time had run out on the Carroll case.

PFRS then turned its focus to Carroll's partner in crime scenes, Thomas Rohling.

The PFRS board had approved Rohling's disability retirement in 2003. Rohling claimed he was "totally and permanently" [disabled from injuries caused when a window valance fell on him](#) in a Morris County courtroom. Despite conflicting reports from doctors on whether he could return to work, the PFRS board had ruled in Rohling's favor.

Not only that, but the board had granted Rohling an "accidental disability" retirement – a more generous type of pension granted to law enforcement officers whose injuries are determined to have occurred in line-of-duty accidents. As a result, [Rohling currently collects \\$65,904 a year](#), tax-free.

With knowledge of his role at Tragic Solutions, the PFRS board voted in 2006 to end Rohling's disability retirement. "If you're totally and permanently disabled, in my honest opinion, you shouldn't be able to work anymore," said Sierchio.

Rohling appealed. In 2009, an administrative law judge overturned the PFRS board's decision. Weighing conflicting testimony from doctors, the [judge ruled that Rohling still qualified for disability](#) — despite his employment with Tragic Solutions.

Both Carroll and Rohling will draw disability pensions for the rest of their lives.

So far, Rohling has received \$582,000 in accidental disability pay — a figure that would grow to \$2 million by his 70th birthday. Carroll has collected \$310,000 in "ordinary disability" checks. At age 73, he should hit the \$1 million mark.

Rohling could not be reached for comment. Carroll refused to be interviewed, saying he has not been part of Tragic Solutions for a "long time."

Without elaborating, Carroll suggested he got a raw deal because he was approved for ordinary disability, but not accidental disability benefits.

"Look at the people who get rubber-stamped," Carroll told NBC 4's Chris Glorioso. "I got



[MEET THE BIGGEST 'TRIPLE-DIPPER' IN THE NEW JERSEY STATEHOUSE](#) — Investigative Report by Mark Lagerkvist



[NEW JERSEY PROSECUTORS EMPLOY 125 DOUBLE-DIPPING 'RETIREES'](#) by Mark Lagerkvist



[ATTORNEY GENERAL'S 23 DOUBLE-DIPPING AGENTS 'ARREST' \\$14 MILLION FROM STATE PENSION FUNDS](#) — by Mark Lagerkvist



[CHRISTIE'S 'RETIRED' BUDGET GURU POKETS \\$1M IN PUBLIC PAYMENTS](#) — by Mark Lagerkvist

View more Audio and Video [here](#).

THE DOG'S BLOGS

- [ABC News – The Blotter](#)
- [AFP New Jersey](#)
- [APP.com](#)
- [courierpostonline](#)
- [News 12 New Jersey](#)
- [NJ.com](#)
- [NJN News](#)
- [NorthJersey.com](#)
- [Politicker NJ](#)
- [pressofaltanticcity.com](#)
- [ProPublica](#)
- [saywhatNJ](#)
- [Watchdog.org](#)

Categories

Audio

FETCH

GO

denied (for accidental disability). There is a lot of information you don't have, and you're not going to get it from me."

Meanwhile, Sierchio and other reform advocates are seeking legal solutions to help the pension system avoid future tragedies.

One promising bill stalled in the state legislature last year, despite bi-partisan support and the sponsorship of Senate President Stephen Sweeney.

If enacted, [S-1913](#) would create a disability fraud unit, give pension boards a right to re-examine disability retirees beyond five years and set limits on the amount of disability pay a retiree can collect after taking another job.

###

*Photo by Associated Press published under license with AP.*

---

Share this:



Posted under [Big Stories](#), [New Jersey](#), [New Jersey Watchdog](#).

Leave a Reply

Logged in as [Lagerkvist](#). [Logout »](#)

Notify me of follow-up comments by email.

Notify me of new posts by email.

Podcast powered by [podPress v8.8.10.13](#)

[Copyright & Legal](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Newsletter](#)

Powered by [e1evation llc](#)