

Private investigator arrested for alleged witness tampering

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A private investigator in Yakima is facing allegations that she intimidated and bribed witnesses and victims in homicide, kidnapping and assault cases while working for suspects in those cases.

Stephanie L. Barnes, 38, who appeared at a preliminary hearing Monday, was arrested Friday and is being held on \$500,000 bail pending the filing of formal charges.

She is accused of using bribery and intimidation to convince victims and witnesses to change their statements in several serious cases, according to probable cause affidavits filed in Superior Court by detectives from both the Yakima County Sheriff's Office and the Yakima Police Department.

During Monday's preliminary hearing, Barnes, who worked for S&P Investigations and Consultants in Yakima, shook her head and smiled as she glanced at a few people present on her behalf in the courtroom.

Two cases are highlighted in the affidavit: a kidnapping case handled by the Sheriff's Office and a Yakima police assault case. Her arrest was the result of a joint investigation by the departments.

In the kidnapping case, Barnes is accused of passing on bribes from suspects to the victim to get the victim's statements changed and make prosecution more difficult, according to court documents.

The bribes allegedly included a red 2006 Audi sedan, \$30,000 and a promise not to harm the victim or the victim's family, according to court documents. Barnes is also accused of telling the victim that the suspects knew where the victim resided.

Deputies answered the kidnapping call March 4, and obtained taped statements from the victim, who said he'd been called a police snitch and had been kidnapped and threatened by four gang members. Those suspects remain in the Yakima County jail, according to the court documents.

Phone discussions between Barnes and two of the suspects while in custody support the victim's claims of being bribed and threatened, investigators said in the documents. Investigators acquired the recorded phone discussions on the jail's phone system because Barnes, who is not an attorney, was working independently for the suspects. The calls thus were not subject to attorney-client privilege, they said.

Later, the victim agreed to wear a wire in a face-to-face meeting with Barnes, and detectives recorded the conversation.

In the assault case, Barnes is accused of pressuring a witness to change statements provided to law enforcement that one of two suspects was in possession of a gun.

In that case, a boyfriend allegedly showed up unannounced at his girlfriend's house and confronted her new boyfriend with a gun. He refused to leave and pushed the woman. When police arrived, he left in a car with another man, who allegedly tossed the gun into a nearby alley, according to court documents. That man later was arrested for illegal possession of a firearm, and weeks later the boyfriend was arrested after eluding police.

Barnes is not only accused of pressuring a witness to say the man was not in possession of the gun, but also convincing the boyfriend, whose criminal history was less extensive, to lie and submit a statement saying he had kept the gun in his pocket the entire time, court documents said.

Barnes had also worked for Sneak a Peek Review, another private investigating firm in Yakima.

Additional charges may be brought, possibly in a homicide, in which Barnes is believed to have tampered with or intimidated witnesses, said sheriff's Sgt. Mike Russell.



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WOW! This is BIG! I also think they need to charge the attorneys who used her falsified information with the same charges.

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