

Pardoned convict files suit alleging torture, cover-up

By Steve Mills

Tribune staff reporter

The third of four Death Row inmates pardoned by Gov. George Ryan before he left office filed a lawsuit Monday, alleging that Chicago police detectives tortured him into confessing to a murder he did not commit.

Stanley Howard, who was convicted and sentenced to death for the 1984 murder of Oliver Ridgell, says in the lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court, that detectives at the Area 2 violent crimes unit tortured him and that police officials covered up the brutality.

Howard alleges that Cook County prosecutors knew of the alleged torture but "chose to turn a blind eye" to the abuse.

A police spokesman declined to comment on Monday, saying it is department policy not to discuss pending lawsuits.

A spokeswoman for Cook County state's attorney Richard Devine, said Monday that the office had not yet seen the lawsuit.

But spokeswoman Marcy Jensen noted that "Howard remains in prison for two brutal rapes of elderly women, and no court had given enough credence to his claims" before Ryan pardoned him.

Howard is the third of the four Death Row inmates who were pardoned to file a lawsuit stemming from his wrongful conviction.

Madison Hobley, who was convicted and sentenced to death for setting a 1987 fire in an apartment building on the South Side that killed his wife, infant son and five other people, filed a lawsuit in May.

Aaron Patterson, who was convicted and sentenced to

death for the 1986 stabbing murders of Vincent and Rafaela Sanchez in their South Chicago home, filed a suit in June.

Ryan granted pardons based on innocence to Howard, Hobley, Patterson and Leroy Orange, after his office studied the cases and decided the evidence against them was insufficient.

Specifically, Ryan said the confessions were unreliable.

Howard is the only one of the four who was not released immediately. He is serving time for rape, kidnapping and other convictions, though Ryan said those cases were questionable as well.

The lawsuit names the Police Department and the state's attorney's office as defendants, as well as former Cmdr. Jon Burge, a half-dozen detectives and two former superintendents, LeRoy Martin and Terry Hillard. Burge declined to comment. Martin and Hillard could not be reached.

Also named are Gayle Shines, the former head of the Police Department's Office of Professional Standards, and Thomas Needham, who had served as Hillard's general counsel.

Both were accused of suppressing an OPS report of a reinvestigation of Howard's torture claim. That report found Howard's claim credible. Shines and Needham declined to comment.

The Chicago Police Board fired Burge in 1993 for the torture of Andrew Wilson while he was being questioned in the murders of two police officers. Wilson was convicted and is serving a life sentence.

Last year, Edward Egan, who has been a prosecutor and an Illinois Appellate Court judge, was named special prosecutor to conduct an investigation of the Area 2 torture allegations.