

Astakhov 'Imposter' Detained

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A former Samara teacher who legally changed his name to Pavel Astakhov and started offering legal services faces charges of identity theft for purportedly impersonating the children's ombudsman and celebrity lawyer of the same name.

The suspect and his associates offered to solve legal problems using "Astakhov's" connections and political influence but disappeared after taking clients' money, Veronika Kochetova, a spokeswoman for the children's ombudsman, said by telephone Wednesday.

The ombudsman, whose government job prevents him from running a legal practice, learned about the other Astakhov a week ago after stumbling on an online advertisement, Interfax reported.

He [filed](#) a complaint with the police, who requested a meeting with the second Astakhov, posing as clients, and detained him, Lifenews.ru [reported](#).

The suspect, born Oleg Astafyev, 43, has denied wrongdoing in quitting his teaching job

in Samara to embark on a judicial career in Moscow under his new name, telling police officers: "I'm within my rights. I've done nothing illegal," Lifenews.ru reported.

Nevertheless, police are preparing criminal charges against him that he illegally posed as the ombudsman when offering his services, Interfax reported.

It was unclear Wednesday whether any victims of the alleged fraud were found. Kochetova said the second Astakhov is thought to have opened his legal firm in 2009.

The legal firm remained open this week, but its receptionists refused to speak about their boss's identity, Lifenews.ru said.

"You need to talk to the management, and then we'll show you documents," a company representative told the news site. "You must understand that Astakhov himself may not be able to meet you, but we have many qualified specialists."

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