

PENINSULA DAILY NEWS

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Jefferson inmate sues county over lost pinkie

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PENINSULA DAILY NEWS

PORT HADLOCK — A Jefferson County jail inmate who lost a finger after being transported from the jail to the hospital has taken Jefferson County to federal court, claiming his civil rights were violated.

His lawsuit, filed this month in U.S. District Court in Tacoma, also names Jefferson County Jail Superintendent Steve Richmond as a defendant.

Zachary Barbee, 27, seeks compensation and punitive damages from Jefferson County and Richmond in connection with alleged civil rights violations.

A trial date, likely in a year, will be set next month, said Barbee's attorney, Erik Heipt, of the Seattle-based law firm Budge and Heipt.

Barbee's pinkie finger was amputated after at least four

surgeries performed by Seattle Harborview Medical Center doctors in early October to treat his infected hand.

Aid allegedly denied

The plaintiff alleges in the lawsuit that Jefferson County Jail personnel denied necessary medical attention after he pleaded for help for three straight days.

"Barbee went through a tremendous amount of pain," Heipt said Monday.

"He could have easily lost his whole hand, or his life. What's there to prevent it from happening again?"

Before the trial begins, both sides have nearly a year to gather information to build their cases.

Heipt said he plans to question Sheriff Mike Brasfield, jail personnel and other county officials in depositions.

Contacted Monday, Brasfield declined to comment on the

case because the matter is pending court procedures.

Attorney Michael Patterson, representing the county, was not available Monday.

Heipt's law firm successfully settled another civil rights lawsuit with the county in October.

Jefferson County agreed to pay a record \$1.6 million to the parents of Texas man Kevin Wayne Bledsoe, who died in 2001 while in restraints at the county jail.

It was the largest such award for Jefferson County and one of the biggest ever for an excessive-force case in the Pacific Northwest.

Bledsoe, 23, was the victim of gross mishandling by officers, a federal lawsuit against the county alleged.

Brasfield was not sheriff at the time of the Bledsoe incident.

Heipt said his past experience with the county jail played a role in why he now represents Barbee.