

Jefferson Co. agrees to pay \$1.6 million for jail death

The Associated Press

BREMERTON — Jefferson County has agreed to pay a record \$1.6 million to settle a lawsuit filed over an inmate's death while in restraints at the county jail.

At issue was the 2001 death of Kevin Wayne Bledsoe, 23. His parents sued the county in federal court, alleging he was the victim of excessive force and gross mishandling by officers.

"Kevin Bledsoe lost his life after members of the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office sprayed him in the face with pepper spray, tied him up in a controversial 'hog-tie' position using a homemade rope, put a hood over his injured and bleeding head, brought him to the Jefferson County jail rather than to a hospital, and held him face down on the floor of an isolation cell until he suddenly went limp and lost consciousness," the lawsuit says. Instead of getting him medical aid, the officers left him lying face down in a pool of blood, the lawsuit said.

Bledsoe was arrested after a fight in a supermarket parking lot. He had recently moved to Port Hadlock from Texas.

The county disputed the facts as presented by the plaintiffs.

Former County Administrator David Goldsmith, who handled the case for the county after his retirement, declined comment except to say the county did not consider it an "excessive force" case. None of the officers involved was disciplined following an investigation.

Methamphetamine was found in Bledsoe's system, and an independent pathologist said his death was caused by the drug and an existing heart condition.

The county will pay \$10,000 out of pocket, Goldsmith said. The rest of the settlement is covered by insurance.