

# Jefferson settles inmate death lawsuit

County pays  
\$1.6 million to  
victim's family

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PORT TOWNSEND — Jefferson County has paid a record \$1.6 million to the parents of a 23-year-old Port Hadlock man who died in custody in the county jail in 2001.

The settlement ends a federal civil rights lawsuit alleging that Jefferson County sheriff's deputies used excessive force and failed to secure medical care for Kevin Wayne Bledsoe.

The settlement was paid last week through the Washington Counties Risk Pool for liability insurance.

A motion for dismissal of the case, which was scheduled this month to go before a federal trial jury, has been filed as part of the settlement.

Jefferson County officials contested the arguments made by Bledsoe's attorneys in the lawsuit, Sheriff Mike Brasfield said in a written statement Friday.

The county also contested liability in the lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in Tacoma.

"The county's insurers entered into a settlement

agreement in order to resolve the matter and to avoid a lengthy and protracted trial," Brasfield said.

Brasfield was elected as sheriff in November 2002. The jail incident occurred under the watch of former Sheriff Pete Piccini.

## Cause of death

Regardless of the settlement, Bledsoe's cause of death remains in dispute.

While the county cites Washington forensic pathologist Dr. Daniel Selove's conclusions that Bledsoe died of "acute methamphetamine intoxication" at the jail with "stressful restraints" and "dilated cardiomyopathy," the civil rights attorneys representing Bledsoe's parents argue otherwise.

Seattle attorneys Erik Heipt and Edwin Budge brought in world-renown forensic pathologist Dr. Verner Spitz, who concluded the cause of death was "asphyxiation."

The findings by Spitz, who Heipt on Friday said "wrote the book on forensic pathology" with his involvement in the John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King and Nicole Brown Simpson murder cases, were confirmed by Dr. Richard Cummins, a professor of emergency medicine at the University Washington.