

# Sonoma Co. Settles Suit In Teen's Shooting Death

## CBS 5 CrimeWatch



Jeremiah Chass.

Sonoma County has settled a wrongful death civil lawsuit in connection with the fatal shooting of 16-year old Jeremiah Chass by two sheriff's deputies in the driveway of his family's Sebastopol area home in 2007.

The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors approved the \$1.75 million settlement Tuesday afternoon.

"We think the payment of this sum is significant acknowledgement that errors were made that led to his unnecessary death," said Patrick Emery, one of the Chass family's attorneys.

"It's very important that families in Sonoma County feel safe when calling for assistance from the sheriff's department and not be fearful of their response," Emery said. "The settlement is an important acknowledgement of that fact."

Sonoma County Sheriff Bill Cogbill said in a prepared statement, "The death of Jeremiah Chass was a true tragedy for the family, the deputies involved and the community. While I as everyone involved wish the outcome could have been different, the actions by the deputies were justified under the circumstances. This has been verified by a review by the District Attorney's Office as well as a review by the Sonoma County Grand Jury."

Sonoma County District Attorney Stephan Passalacqua concluded the officers acted lawfully and no criminal charges against them are warranted.

"A settlement with the family in this case is not an admission of any wrongdoing by the County," Cogbill said. "We believe the facts of the case show that our deputies' actions were legal and responsible."

"However, because of the naturally sympathetic nature of this case, and the unpredictability of the civil legal process, our best judgment was not to risk additional taxpayer dollars during these difficult fiscal times. On the positive side, this settlement allows the Chass family, the deputies involved, the community, and the Department to move forward from this tragic incident," Cogbill said.

Cogbill also said the training, practices, policies and procedures of the sheriff's department are up to date and relevant and meet or exceed the standards of other law enforcement agencies and those

required by the California Peace Officers Standards and Training.

Chass was shot seven times in the back of his family's van by deputies John Misita and Jim Ryan at his family's residence off High School Road in Sebastopol on March 12, 2007.

His parents initially called the Sebastopol Fire Department that morning for medical help to take Chass to a hospital because Chass was experiencing what later was described as a psychotic breakdown.

The fire department notified Sebastopol police who then put the family in touch with the sheriff's department.

The sheriff's department said Chass threatened his younger brother Isaiah with a Leatherman-style tool in the back of the van and fought violently against the deputies who struggled with him. The sheriff's department said the deputies believed Isaiah's and their lives were in danger.

Chass kicked Ryan several times in the face during the struggle in the van and thought he was going to become unconscious, according to the sheriff's department's account of the incident. He saw Misita fighting for his life and Chass still flailing the knife in his hand and realized his only option to save Misita was to shoot Chass, the sheriff's department said.

Ryan shot Chass several times but he kept fighting and Misita shot Chass once, the sheriff's department said.

The shooting caused an uproar about the deadly use of force by law enforcement against mentally ill people and the lack of adequate facilities to house them when they suffer psychotic breakdowns.

The sheriff's department also was criticized because according to a timeline by Santa Rosa police, which investigated the fatal shooting, and the sheriff's department, Chass was fatally shot six minutes after Misita arrived at the scene at 8:44 a.m. and two minutes after Ryan arrived at 8:48 a.m. Chass was pronounced dead at 9 a.m. An autopsy showed there were no prescription or illegal drugs or alcohol in his body.

Emery said part of the settlement stipulates 8-year-old Isaiah Chass will receive \$275,000 for his college education.

The complaint was filed in the U.S. District Court, Northern District, in San Francisco.

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