

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/local/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_15\\_926526,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/local/article/0,1299,DRMN_15_926526,00.html)

## **Deputy denies family's claim in Columbine suit**

**Arapahoe officer 'never in position' to see if cop shot Daniel Rohrbough**

**By Tillie Fong, News Staff Writer**

Arapahoe County Deputy Jim Taylor said Monday that he was not in a position to see whether a police officer shot a student during the Columbine tragedy.

The statement came in a press release issued by the Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office. Taylor was disputing allegations made last week by the family of Columbine victim Daniel Rohrbough.

"Arapahoe County Sheriff's Deputy Jim Taylor was never on the south/west portion of Columbine High School on April 20, 1999, and as a result was never in a position to witness or hear a weapon being fired from that location," read the statement.

"Deputy Taylor never heard any gun shots on April 20th and never saw any deceased victims on April 20th."

Last week, victims' families filed additional claims in their federal suit against law enforcement officials. The filing identified Denver Sgt. Daniel O'Shea as the officer the Rohrbough family believes shot their son.

The court documents also named two witnesses who allegedly saw Daniel Rohrbough during the rampage.

"Deputy Taylor specifically remembers that when he initially arrived in the lower student parking lot a Denver police officer was there somewhere to his left, and he remembers hearing the sound of machine gun fire (Sergeant O'Shea was firing a submachine gun)," wrote victims' attorney Barry Arrington.

"Deputy Taylor saw a boy (whom he later was able to identify as Daniel Rohrbough) running at a fast trot down the sidewalk with a group of children, and he saw this boy get shot and drop to the ground," the filing said.

Arapahoe County Sheriff Pat Sullivan declined to elaborate on the press release Monday night.

"It's self-evident," he said.

Neither Taylor nor Daniel Rohrbough's father, Brian Rohrbough, could be reached for comment Monday night.

The Rohrbough suit is among eight thrown out by a federal judge in November. The dismissals are being appealed.

The lawsuits by those killed or wounded at Columbine claim law enforcement and school officials should have heeded warning signs before the rampage and that they bungled the response to the shootings.

The parents of slain student Isalah Shoels filed a supplementary motion Monday asking a federal judge to admit the journal of killer Eric Harris into evidence and reconsider an earlier denial of a motion for authorities to turn over evidence.

*The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

**January 1, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

# Colorado & The West

Richard S. Chapman, State Editor — (303) 892-2783 • e-mail — metro@RockyMountainNews.com

## REGIONAL BRIEFING

### 'Satanic' Potter books burned

**ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.** — As hundreds protested nearby, a church group burned Harry Potter books Sunday, calling them "a master-piece of satanic deception."

"These books teach children how they can get into witchcraft and become a witch, wizard or warlock," said Jack Brock, pastor and founder of the Christ Community Church. Members sang *Ave Maria* Grace as they threw Potter books, plus other books and magazines, into the fire.

Across the street, protesters chanting "Stop burning books" stretched in a line a quarter-mile long.

...lawyer response plans in ... and

But he won't guarantee an investigation into Columbine student's death will be conclusive

By Dick Fiedler

New Southern Review

**COLUMBINE SPRINGS** — El Paso County Sheriff John Anderson won't promise a definitive answer as to whether or not a Denver police officer killed Columbine High School student Daniel Robbrough.

But Anderson guaranteed Monday that his new investigation will be a fair and impartial search to determine the truth.

"There will be those who have the preconceived idea that law enforcement will stick together, that they'll cover for one another," Anderson told the *Rocky Mountain News*.



"I can assure you that I would not allow my own integrity or more importantly that of this office, to be involved in any kind of a cover-up."

Anderson was asked by Jefferson County Sheriff John Scione on Friday to conduct an outside investigation into Robbrough's shooting amid warring contro-

Go to [RockyMountainNews.com](http://RockyMountainNews.com) for comprehensive coverage of the Columbine shootings.

versy surrounding the 15-year-old student's death in the April 20, 1999, shootings at Columbine.

Robbrough's parents have charged that Denver police Sgt. Daniel O'Shea shot their son in the chaos that ensued when Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris attacked the school. O'Shea has denied that.

The Robbrough lawsuit was dismissed by a federal judge, but the family appealed the ruling. They filed a sworn statement last week from a Jefferson County school administrator who claimed

O'Shea had broken down in front of her, saying he feared he had shot an innocent student during the melee.

Anderson cautioned that his department's new examination of the evidence may not turn up anything more than did the previous investigation into Robbrough's death, which was inconclusive.

But he said it may show definitively that Robbrough was or was not shot by O'Shea.

"If the evidence is not there to support either of these allegations, that the officer was or was not the one who fired the shot, then we'll have to live with that,"

See INVESTIGATION on 24A

Those who have worked with Anderson over the years expect a thorough and impartial effort.

Anderson, 42, is in his second term as sheriff after a career in the Colorado Springs Police Department.

"He's a straight-up kind of guy. He's not a deal-maker. You can't get to him," said retired FBI agent Charlie Nease, who volunteers his time to work on unsolved cases in the department.

"They couldn't have picked a better guy. That man will not bend a rule," said Lou Smit, a retired Colorado Springs homicide detective best known for first suggesting the innocence of John and Patsy Ramsey in the death of their daughter, Jon Benet.

Anderson lured Smit out of retirement after taking office in 1995 to find the murderer of 13-year-old Heather Dawn Church, whose skeletal remains were found on a deserted mountain road two years after her 1991 disappearance.

Five months later, Smit and Anderson had their killer. An exhaustive nationwide hunt matched fingerprints with a man living a mile from the Church home, who confessed to the killing.

Smit, however, will not be a part of the Robinson investigation, Anderson said.

## 2-3 Month inquiry is expected

INVESTIGATION from 7A

too," he said. "There is the reality that you're not going to please everybody."

Anderson's office began Monday outlining the scope and parameters of the investigation.

Four to five investigators will be assigned to the probe, which could take two to three months, he said. The investigators will focus only on this aspect of the Columbine shootings. They hope to reinterview witnesses, including law enforcement officers, and re-examine physical evidence.

"I've always believed that a criminal investigation is nothing more than a search for the truth and the truth will be based on the facts, the physical evidence, the crime scene and the reconstructive effort that will go on. And that will be done in a fair, objective, impartial manner without any preconceived outcome in mind," Anderson said.

Asked if he would have subpoena power to summon witnesses, Anderson said, "We've not gotten into specifics as to whether that would be necessary."

A previous probe by the Governor's Columbine Review Commission was hampered by the refusal of Stone and others to testify and the commission's lack of subpoena power to compel their testimony, said Commission Chairman William Erickson, a former state Supreme Court chief justice.

[home page](#) [archives](#) [marketplace](#) [contact us](#) [coloradosprings.com](#)

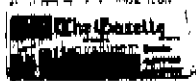
# gazette.com

**sections**  
metro | obits  
business  
life | gol  
sports | weather

**online features**  
ap wire | manbc  
cinema guide  
gazette services  
quick facts

**market place**  
classified  
careers | coupons  
real estate | auto  
print ads online

**Subscribe Today!**



January 3, 2002

## Columbine parents seek federal probe

The Associated Press

**LITTLETON** - The parents of four students slain at Columbine High School called for a federal investigation Wednesday into the 1999 massacre, saying a police officer accidentally shot one of the victims and authorities tried to cover it up.

Brian Rohrbough called a news conference to bolster his claim that Arapahoe County Deputy Jim Taylor saw his son, Daniel, get shot.

In a court motion filed last week, Rohrbough named Denver police Sgt. Dan O'Shea as the person who shot his son, based partly on statements attributed to Taylor.

Taylor and Arapahoe County Sheriff Pat Sullivan have denied Taylor saw the shooting.

Rohrbough played a tape recording Wednesday he said was Taylor saying he saw about two dozen students running out of the school and then saw a boy fall. The man identified as Taylor recognized the boy as Daniel Rohrbough through a photo in a newspaper the next day.

The recording was made without Taylor's knowledge 11 months after the shootings during dinner and a movie with Daniel Rohrbough's mother and stepfather, Sue and Rich Petrone, longtime friends of Taylor's.

Rohrbough and the parents of Lauren Townsend, Kelly Fleming and Matthew Kechter said Taylor's recent denial he witnessed the shooting, coupled with testimony by a school administrator who said O'Shea told her he might have shot a student, suggests a cover-up by authorities.

Authorities have denied a cover-up.

**Th**

**Need a  
PRODU  
SERV**

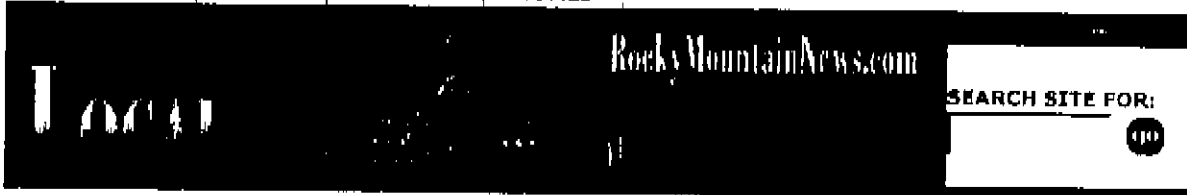


**So  
NO  
How**





CLASSIFIEDS AUTOS CAREERS HOMES



HOME NEWS SPORTS BUSINESS ENTERTAINMENT RECREATION LIVING COMMUNITY

## LOCAL

- Weather
- Columbine

## INSIDE COLUMBINE

### Chronicle

- Police report
- Complete archive
- Timeline: First year
- Shooting chronology
- Flash retrospective

### Multimedia

- Columbine tour
- 911 calls
- 911 dispatches
- 911 transcripts

### Photography

- Columbine tour
- Inside Columbine
- Pullitzer photos

### Other shootings

- Santee, Calif.
- West Paducah, Ky.
- Jonesboro, Ark.
- Springfield, Ore.

PRINT THIS STORY | E-MAIL THIS STORY

## Tape points to cop's 'lie', says Columbine mom

Families want federal grand jury to investigate shootings, get to truth

By Kevin Vaughan, News Staff Writer

Four Columbine families on Wednesday called for a federal investigation into the school tragedy after playing tape recordings that seemed to contradict the statements this week of a law officer at the scene.

The latest dispute revolves around Arapahoe County sheriff's deputy Jim Taylor, who contended this week that he never told the family of Daniel Rohrbough that he saw the boy die outside the school and that he did not see anyone get shot on April 20, 1999.

"For him now to come out and say he never said any of these things and he never witnessed any of these things is a bald-faced lie," Sue Petrone, Daniel Rohrbough's mother, said after playing the recordings.

She and other family members asked that a federal grand jury be convened to look into Columbine, the worst school shooting in U.S. history.

Taylor, who is on administrative leave while Arapahoe County sheriff's officials investigate the matter, could not be reached Wednesday for comment.

Taylor's involvement in the Columbine tragedy came to light on Dec. 26 when Rohrbough's family filed papers in federal court naming



Ellen Jaskol © News

Sue Petrone, mother of Columbine shooting victim Daniel Rohrbough, talks about a tape recording of Arapahoe County deputy Jim Taylor that she and her ex-husband, Brian Rohrbough, left, released Wednesday.

### RELATED STORIES

Littwin: Tale of the tape leads Rohrbough to terrible place

Editorial: High time for a grand jury

### RELATED LINKS

Audio: Conversations between Sue and Rich Petrone and Jim and Pam Taylor (4:44)

Featured



Denver police Sgt. Dan O'Shea as his killer. Rohrbough's family had long alleged that a law officer -- not Columbine killers Eric Harris or Dylan Klebold -- had fired the bullet that killed the 15-year-old, but they hadn't named anyone until last week.

O'Shea has denied the allegation. Jefferson County sheriff's officials maintain that Daniel was killed in the first moments of the attack by Harris or Klebold before law officers arrived at the scene.

The papers were filed as the Rohrboughs and the families of four other students who died at Columbine tried to revive their lawsuits against Jefferson County authorities, which had been dismissed a month before.

In the papers, the families attributed statements made to them by Taylor as part of the basis for naming O'Shea in the lawsuit.

On Monday, Arapahoe County Sheriff Pat Sullivan disputed the account in the lawsuit, issuing a press release that contended Taylor had given a written statement in which he denied even being on the south side of the school -- where Rohrbough died -- on April 20, 1999.

Wednesday afternoon, Rohrbough's parents held a press conference and played sections of an audiotape they said was made in early 2000. The tape was made at the home of Rohrbough's mother and step-father, Sue and Rich Petrone, and they and other family members said the other voices on the recording belong to Taylor and his wife, Pam Taylor.

"What I seen was a boy coming down the sidewalk you know, kind of running, you know, a fast trot, but there was 20 or 30 other kids around, you know, I don't even know the

number," Jim Taylor reportedly said in one section of the tape. "They were just running in mass chaos and I seen a boy drop and that's. . . and that's. . . I don't know who it was."

Rich Petrone then asked if the boy was Daniel.

"It was Dan," the voice said to be the deputy's replied, "and I didn't know that until I seen the photo the next morning in the newspaper that it was the boy that I seen."

The first time Rohrbough's family knew for certain that he had died was on April 21, 1999, when they saw a photograph in the *Rocky Mountain News* taken from a helicopter that showed the boy's body on a sidewalk. Up to that point, they feared the worst because Daniel hadn't come home, but they had not been told by any authorities that he had died.

Also on the tape presented Wednesday, the voice said to be Taylor's can be heard talking about pulling into the Columbine parking lot.

"Kids were running out of the building and you know, you could hear glass breaking, you could see kids running everywhere and that's when I see the boy coming down the sidewalk you know, and I see

him just fall down. That's the first thing I told Pam was that, you know, I seen some kid get shot."

At that point, according to the tape, Pam Taylor interjected: "He did, no kidding, he walked in that night and he says, 'I just, I'll never get rid of this,' he goes, 'seeing this.' And he said, 'This kid reminded me of (our son).'"

On another section of tape, Jim Taylor said he remembered "a Denver cop or a Lakewood cop off to my left-hand side."

Taylor later said his commanders were calling him to get to the east side of the building, so he went over there.

Sue Petrone said Taylor probably did not know that he was being recorded when the conversation occurred at her kitchen table. She and other family members said they began routinely taping their conversations with officials after being lied to by investigators.

At the press conference, two Arapahoe County officials handed out copies of Taylor's four-page, handwritten statement, which was made on Monday.

In it, he said he told Rohrbough's family only what he had seen on television or in the newspaper.

"Regarding being a witness to the Columbine shooting and standing next to a Denver officer while he shot (that is not true) the only things that were stated to Rohrbough family by me was seen on TV or reported in the newspaper," the statement said. "I'm sorry for their loss. It is not true that I saw Daniel Rohrbough get shot or any other person."

Rohrbough's father, Brian Rohrbough, said Taylor told him essentially the same story the day after Columbine.

"Jim was visibly shaken," Rohrbough said. "There was really no doubt in my mind that he believed what he said."

"We're providing this tape to prove that we not only had the meeting but that this evidence is credible."

Jim Taylor was a longtime friend of the Rohrbough family who babysat Daniel when he was a young boy.

Sullivan said he hopes to meet with the Rohrbough family and listen to a copy of the entire conversation.

"We're very interested in the context of each of those statements and what really was going on there," Sullivan said.

Taylor, he said, is the subject of an internal affairs investigation that will be focused on determining what he said in the statement on Monday and whether it is contradicted by the tape recordings.

Taylor has been with the Arapahoe County Sheriff's Department

Office since 1988.

"He's a very good deputy," Sullivan said.

On hand with the Rohrbough family at Wednesday's press conference were parents of three other students who were slain at Columbine: Lauren Townsend's mother and step-father, Dawn Anna and Bruce Beck; Kelly Fleming's father, Don Fleming; and Matt Kechter's father, Joe Kechter.

They are all part of the Rohrbough lawsuit, which alleges, among other things, that Jefferson County sheriff's officials didn't do enough to investigate a March 1998 report that Eric Harris was building bombs and threatening mass death and that they didn't do enough on April 20, 1999, to save students at the school.

"The rest of us, we're looking for the truth," Don Fleming said. "We want to find out what happened that day."

Dawn Anna said she believes a federal investigation is the only way to get answers.

"I've reached my limit," she said. "I've never asked for anything but the truth. I'm still waiting for it."

"I dropped my daughter off at school on April 20. The next time I saw her, five days later, I didn't even recognize her."

Contact Kevin Vaughan at (303) 892-5019 or [vaughank@RockyMountainNews.com](mailto:vaughank@RockyMountainNews.com).

January 3, 2002



2001 © The E.W. Scripps Co.  
**PRIVACY POLICY and USER AGREEMENT**  
Questions? Comments? **TALK TO US.**





CLASSIFIEDS AUTOS CAREERS HOMES

News

RockyMountainNews.com

SEARCH SITE FOR:

go

HOME NEWS SPORTS BUSINESS ENTERTAINMENT RECREATION LIVING COMMUNITY

## NEWS

- Local
- State
- Nation
- World
- Politics
- Education
- Census 2000
- Opinion
- Columnists
- Lottery
- Commuting

## Special reports

In-depth and investigative reports from the pages of the Rocky Mountain News. [Click here.](#)

## Multimedia

Video, 360-degree photography and other multimedia news coverage. [Click here.](#)

## Databases

Learn more about your neighborhood, city and schools with our searchable databases.

- Police shootings
- Terrorist victims
- Election 2001
- 2000 Census
- CSAP results
- T-Rex construction
- Sex offenders
- Crime comparisons
- DPS ethnicity
- School report cards

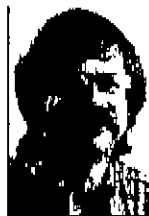
## Denver Square

See Colorado life through the pen of News



PRINT THIS STORY | E-MAIL THIS STORY

## Littwin: Tale of the tape leads Rohrbough to terrible place



Mike Littwin

If you've got Columbine fatigue -- and, let's face it, many people do -- just think how tired Brian Rohrbough must be.

Rohrbough is standing before the cameras again.

He is complaining of a police cover-up -- always a new cover-up -- again. He is asking for the truth of how his son Daniel died that day, again.

He is tired of what he says are lies. He is tired of being doubted. He is tired of having to make his case. Again. And again. And again.

Which brings us to the tale of the tape. And the terrible place this tape takes Brian Rohrbough.

At a news conference Wednesday, Rohrbough and his ex-wife, Sue Petrone, play an audiotape in which Jim Taylor -- an old friend and an Arapahoe County deputy sheriff who was on the scene at Columbine -- is apparently saying he saw their son shot in front of the school.

**The tape is significant** for a few reasons.

One, according to every official Columbine timeline, all the victims who were killed outside the school were shot before any police arrived.

Two, Taylor had just written a statement denying he had ever told Petrone he had seen her son shot or had even been on that side of the school.

## Interact

Your comment:

## READER'S COMMENTS

" To Serve and Protect ( the status quo )" Hey..."

"you greedy money hungry lowlifes,let this poor..."

[Read All Comments »](#)

[Click here to hide user comments in the future](#)

Featured

Y  
Next  
Liv



editorial cartoonist Ed Stein. [Click here.](#) Stein also draws "Stein's View" for the opinion page. [Click here.](#)

### E-newsletters

Sign up for daily e-News updates and receive the latest local news. [Click here.](#)



Three, well, can you spot a trend here? It has come to the point that Rohrbough and Patrone, neither of whom resembles Richard Nixon, now secretly tape everyone who talks to them. Meanwhile, Taylor has been placed on administrative leave as Arapahoe County Sheriff Pat Sullivan, who had defended Taylor, investigates further.

Investigating further seems to be the operative phrase, even as the El Paso County sheriff has now been called in to investigate whether Denver police Sgt. Daniel O'Shea or any other police officer shot Rohrbough. Of course, if this is yet another investigation without subpoena power -- and excuse the legal terminology -- you shouldn't hold your breath.

**That's what Rohrbough** is doing, though, as he tries to get his case, recently rejected in federal court, reinstated. That's what he's doing as we hear calls for a federal grand jury.

Once upon a time, the case seemed so straightforward. Two psychopaths killed 12 classmates, a teacher and themselves. Their only regret, we can safely infer, is that they didn't kill more people. The only puzzle was why, not how.

As for the authorities on the scene, they found themselves in a chaotic situation that no one could have reasonably anticipated. If there were mistakes -- and everyone agrees now there were -- it was because, given the situation, there had to be mistakes.

It seems simple enough.

But if it's so straightforward, Rohrbough has been asking for so long now, why has the official reaction -- personified by Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone -- been so twisted?

There have been mistakes. There have been, uh, misstatements, which Rohrbough prefers to call "bald-faced lies" and of which he lists 29 in his lawsuit. There is information that took time to surface -- and this is my favorite -- such as the 1998 draft warrant to search Harris' home that the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office hadn't bothered to mention.

**You get the idea.** I don't know if Brian Rohrbough is right that O'Shea or some other police officer inadvertently shot his son that day. But I know if you're inclined to believe in conspiracies, the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office is there for you. And now two other police agencies have officers being questioned.

Rohrbough has a theory to offer that is almost too ghastly to consider. He believes -- "It's just speculation," he says -- that an officer shot his son, and it was at that point that the police pulled back the perimeter to deal with that situation.

Here's his theory: "During the ensuing minutes, they let people in the library be slaughtered. They know what was going on and they pulled everyone out. Now that's just a theory."

When I ask what possible motive there could be for allowing a slaughter, he says, "I think the reason Dan's has been covered up is

because it speaks to something worse happening than just Dan. That's the only reason I look for theories. I should say, too, we're talking theories, but only because we've been denied the facts. . . . I'm happy to not be correct in this. I would much prefer to not be right that the people in the library were sacrificed. I would rather think that nothing could have been done to help them, but I know that's not true."

Actually, he can't be sure of that. All he can know for sure is that, after all this time and after all the investigations, it still isn't clear what the truth is.

*Mike Littwin's column appears Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Call him at (303) 892-5428 or e-mail him at [littwinm@rockymountainnews.com](mailto:littwinm@rockymountainnews.com).*

**January 3, 2002**

**MORE LITWIN COLUMNS »**




2001 © The E.W. Scripps Co.  
**PRIVACY POLICY and USER AGREEMENT**  
Questions? Comments? **TALK TO US.**



**You can't meet him...**  **match.com**

[Free Profile](#) 

[CLASSIFIEDS](#) [AUTOS](#) [CAREERS](#) [HOMES](#)

**Local**  [RockyMountainNews.com](#)

SEARCH SITE FOR:

[HOME](#) [NEWS](#) [SPORTS](#) [BUSINESS](#) [ENTERTAINMENT](#) [RECREATION](#) [LIVING](#) [COMMUNITY](#)

## NEWS

### Local

- » Weather
- » Columbine

### State

### Nation

### World

### Politics

### Education

### Census 2000

### Opinion

### Columnists

### Lottery

### Commuting

## SURVEY RESULTS Interact

### READER COMMENTS:

"To Serve and Protect ( the status quo )" Hey Littwin, you ever interested in getting at the Truth?"

JANUARY 3, 2002, 7:11 AM

"you greedy money hungry lowlifes, let this poor officer alone and crawl back under your rocks!"

JANUARY 3, 2002, 4:40 AM

[RETURN TO PREVIOUS PAGE »](#)

## Ready, set, teach!

Three newcomers to the teaching profession test their knowledge and experience against the reality of the classroom. [Click here.](#)

• Does Colorado prepare teachers well? Talk teaching in our forum

## Special reports

In-depth and investigative reports from the pages of the Rocky Mountain News. [Click here.](#)

## Multimedia

Video, 360-degree photography and other multimedia news coverage. [Click here.](#)

## Databases

Learn more about your neighborhood, city and schools with our searchable databases.

- Police shootings
- Terrorist victims

## Featured

**Next  
Live**

**Line  
Cons  
Ho**



**CONTINENT  
HOMES**  
Innsbruck Mc  
North Parker

**CONTINENT  
HOMES**  
Cuchara Moc  
Parker

**Forest Glen  
Castle Pine \**

**INFINITY HC  
COLLECTIO**  
Courageous

**Rock Golf Co**

**RICHMOND  
AMERICAN**  
Immediate M

**Spectacular I**

**SHEFFIELD**

**Fieldstone at**

**SHEFFIELD**  
Northridge In

**US HOME**

**Stunning Live**

**VILLAGE HC**  
Castle Pines  
New Home A

**sections**  
metro | obits  
business  
life | go!  
sports | weather

**online features**  
ap wire | msnbc  
cinema guide  
gazette services  
quick facts

**market place**  
classified  
careers | coupons  
real estate | auto  
print ads online

**Subscribe Today!**



January 4, 2002

## Suthers will be requested in case

By Barry Bortnick The Gazette

DENVER - Colorado's U.S. attorney may have to enter the Columbine fray.

An attorney representing the family of a boy killed during the 1999 high school massacre will formally request a federal grand jury investigation into claims a Denver police officer accidentally killed Daniel Rohrbough.

Lakewood attorney Barry Arrington said he will make an official request of U.S. Attorney John Suthers by Monday.

"I hope the letter is received favorably," Arrington said Thursday. "John Suthers is a fair man."

Suthers' spokesman, Jeff Dorschner, said the U.S. Attorney's Office will not devote resources to a probe unless there was "a reasonable belief that a federal crime had been committed."

Pam Russell, spokeswoman for Jefferson County District Attorney Dave Thomas, said there is no new evidence for a grand jury to review.

"You have to believe there was criminal conduct to convene a grand jury," she said. "We have no reason to believe there was anything criminal that took place during the investigation."

Within hours, Gov. Bill Owens urged Thomas to reconsider.

"A grand jury investigation may be helpful in resolving the continuing controversies surrounding Columbine," he said in a written statement.

Owens said he will not revive the commission he appointed to review Columbine.

Arrington said the Columbine tragedy falls within federal bounds because it deals with an alleged conspiracy to conceal 14th Amendment violations.

"Deprivation of life is a violation of the Constitution," Arrington said.

"We allege that through recklessness Daniel Rohrbough was killed and other students were allowed to be killed."

The parents of four students slain at Columbine High School called for a federal investigation Wednesday, saying a Denver police officer accidentally shot Daniel.

The families also alleged the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office tried to cover up the truth behind the teen's death. They have yet to make a formal request for an investigation.



In a court motion filed last week, Daniel's father, Brian Rohrbough, named Denver police Sgt. Dan O'Shea as the person who shot his son. O'Shea has denied involvement.

Rohrbough bolstered his claims by releasing statements allegedly made by an Arapahoe County sheriff's deputy, who reportedly indicated Daniel died from friendly fire. The alleged statements were captured during a tape-recorded conversation held 11 months after the shooting.

Jim Taylor, the Arapahoe County deputy, has denied seeing the shooting.

Rohrbough wants the federal investigation despite an independent investigation into Daniel's death by the El Paso County Sheriff's Office at the request of Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone.

Rohrbough called the El Paso County investigation a waste of time.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

---

Copyright 2001, The Gazette, a Freedom Communications, Inc. Company. All rights reserved. Contact

us.

**sections**  
metro | obits  
business  
life | go!  
sports | weather

**online features**  
ap wire | msnbc  
cinema guide  
gazette services  
quick facts

**market place**  
classified  
careers | coupons  
real estate | auto  
print ads online

**Subscribe Today!**



January 4, 2002

## Investigation Into a killing

### County will review Columbine death

By Pam Zuback The Gazette

El Paso County will conduct a criminal investigation into who shot a Columbine High School student, Sheriff John Anderson said Thursday.

"If the allegations prove true, there may be a criminal charge," Anderson told county commissioners, saying the investigation will not be a significant drain on department resources.

His comments came during a County Commission meeting in which he explained how he'll handle the investigation of allegations a police officer shot Daniel Rohrbough and Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone concealed evidence of the shooting.

The 15-year-old died during the massacre on April 20, 1999, in which 12 students and a teacher died. Students Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris killed themselves after carrying out the assault.

Brian Rohrbough, who alleged in a lawsuit the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office has covered up the investigation, says his son was shot by a Denver SWAT officer.

On Wednesday, he played for reporters a tape recording he said contains the voice of an Arapahoe County deputy giving an eyewitness account. The officer issued a statement Wednesday denying he saw the shooting.

Anderson agreed to investigate at Stone's request Dec. 28.

On Monday, Anderson's spokeswoman Lt. Melissa Hartman said four to five officers will work the case full time for two to three months, slowing progress on local cases. Travel costs - not staff time - will be paid by Jefferson County, she said.

On Thursday, Anderson said there had been a "misunderstanding." He said deputies won't work full time.

Anderson and four or five other people will, "in addition to our other responsibilities, have a few trips to Denver to look at the case, the crime scene data, photographs, autopsy reports, information that's available strictly related to the one student's death and the one officer and any allegations of this potential cover-up," he said.

"Until we actually get that data in front of us, it's going to be difficult to determine the extent of the investigation," he said.

"In the next two to three weeks working part time with a handful of people to sift through that data, we'll have a pretty good understanding of what the physical evidence and facts

Ch

CLIK



So  
NO  
Plan

NE  
HO  
CONNE

show."

He said investigators will go to Denver a few times to conduct three to five interviews with officers involved. He also may hire an "outside independent laboratory" to analyze ballistics evidence.

Anderson assured commissioners local cases will not take a back seat.

"This is not going to be anything that's going to be arduous for this office," he said. "It's not something that's going to have a negative impact to our constituency here. These investigators and myself are not going to be reassigned for the next three months to nothing else."

One of three outcomes are possible, he said: The officer fired the fatal shot, did not fire the shot or the evidence doesn't support either option.

Anderson's report will go to the Jefferson County District Attorney's Office, as requested by Stone. The district attorney will decide whether to file criminal charges.

Anderson told commissioners such help is "not uncommon" under mutual aid agreements among sheriffs.

The cost, he said, will be minimal, less than El Paso County's aid to Teller County a year ago for the Texas Seven's capture, which required assignment of 24 deputies for 48 hours, and to Fremont County in September when the county's SWAT team was deployed to help hunt for a deputy's killers.

Commissioner Tom Huffman said he had "full faith" in Anderson and his department.

Commissioner Jeri Howells asked the sheriff to provide details of recent mutual aid expenses.

"I'm not saying we shouldn't do it, but ... perhaps it would make sense in the future to know what it does add up to, dollar and cents wise."

Commissioner Chuck Brown said getting involved in such a high-profile case is a no-win situation, given all the various interests involved.

Anderson promised not to be "sucked into (a) quagmire" of publicity but rather conduct an independent investigation with credible results.

---

Copyright 2001, The Gazette, a Freedom Communications, Inc. Company. All rights reserved. Contact

## Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_929595,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_929595,00.html)

### Autopsy of Klebold stays sealed

News had appealed Judge's earlier ruling

**By News Staff**

A judge has denied a petition by the *Rocky Mountain News* to make public the entire autopsy report for Columbine High killer Dylan Klebold.

The four-page ruling by District Judge R. Brooke Jackson found that publication of details of Klebold's autopsy would offend a significant portion of the population in the Denver area.

The *News* had originally sought the autopsy reports for Klebold and his partner, Eric Harris, after a judge in 1999 sealed all of the autopsy reports in the Columbine tragedy.

After the *News* appealed, Harris' report was released. However, Klebold's family objected to the release of his autopsy report, and the issue has been in court since.

The *News* has sought the autopsy report as a way to answer lingering questions about whether Klebold killed himself. Although that was the official ruling, some evidence released in the past year appears to contradict that finding.

In his ruling, Jackson found that Klebold's parents, Tom and Sue Klebold, were "part of the group" of surviving family members.

"Whether or not one considers them blameworthy for the actions of their son -- a question on which I express no opinion -- they are parents who have lost a child," Jackson wrote. "They are parents whose lives were shattered on April 20, 1999. And, they are parents who state through counsel that they will be terribly hurt if the graphic details of their son's autopsy are published in the *News* or on the Internet or elsewhere."

John Temple, publisher and editor of the *News*, said he was disappointed by the ruling.

"It's obvious from recent events how many questions remain unanswered in the Columbine case," he said. "We regret that the judge does not believe in the healing power of our sunshine laws."

**January 4, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

## Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_929369,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_929369,00.html)

### Students there when Rohrbough shot

Witness statements point to Klebold, Harris as killers

By Hector Gutierrez, News Staff Writer

Three Columbine students who gave original witness statements to authorities strongly indicate that it was killers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold who shot and killed Daniel Rohrbough.

The students, Sean Graves, Lance Kirklin and Mark William Opfer, told investigators several days after the April 20, 1999, massacre they were standing near Rohrbough, 15, when he was gunned down outside the school. Kirklin and Graves also were seriously wounded during the attack.

Although their accounts had minor discrepancies, the three students said it was Klebold and Harris, clad in black trench coats, who spotted them outside and then opened fire on them.

Brian Rohrbough, Daniel's father, has argued that the youngsters were undergoing a horrific trauma and that their recollection of events may not be reliable.

Opfer told the FBI he was walking next to Rohrbough and going to the library on the outside staircase, northwest of the cafeteria, when he saw two men at the top of the stairs wearing trench coats. He described one as standing about 6 feet, 4 inches, and the other about 5 feet, 8 inches.

Klebold was the taller of the two killers.

"The shorter person began firing the pistol down the stairs," documents quote Opfer as saying. Included in the narrative: "Opfer turned to speak to Rohrbough, who then looked at him strangely and fell down screaming. Opfer realized Rohrbough had been shot, so he ran down the stairs and into the southwest entrance to the cafeteria. . ."

Opfer escaped unharmed.

He could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Kirklin and Graves told investigators they were with Rohrbough and other students in the cafeteria when the three decided to go outside and walk up the hill.

According to Graves, he told investigators he saw the killers standing "side by side at the top near the corner of the library."

"The short guy was on my right," Graves told investigators. "They pointed their guns at us. The tall one shot first, at Dan and he (Dan) yelled. Dan slipped and fell and I can not remember what happened to Dan after that. . ."

Mike Graves, Sean's father, said Thursday his son and family plan to cooperate fully with investigators from the El Paso County Sheriff's Office, which is conducting an independent probe of whether Denver police Sgt. Daniel O'Shea killed Rohrbough.

However, Mike Graves said, "Sean's statements appear to indicate it was one of the (assailants who shot

Rohrbough.)

An Investigator's Interview with Kirklin stated that "at the very top of the stairs he observed an individual in dark clothes, silhouetted by the daylight, at which time he observed the gunman turn and point the gun in their direction, at which time Rohrbough began to fall, at which time he (Kirklin) attempted to catch him and felt himself being shot."

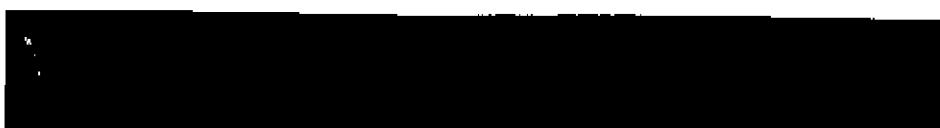
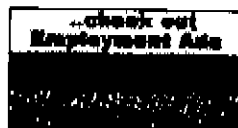
Kirklin couldn't be reached Thursday for comment.

Walter L. Gerash, a lawyer representing the Kirklin and Graves families, said his clients' cases have more to do with the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office's handling of the events prior to the Columbine massacre.

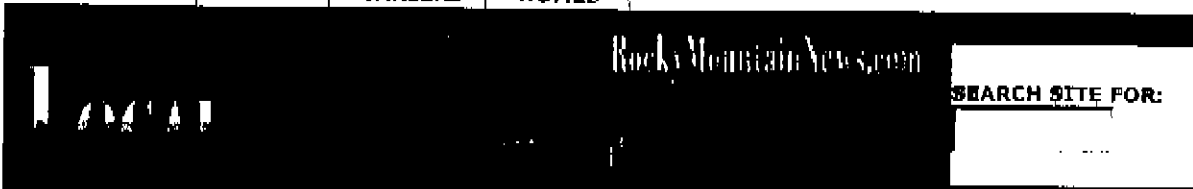
"It's what we call shocking the conscience," Gerash said. "Negligence won't do it. Our position in the pleadings is concentrated to the 13 months prior."

**January 4, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.



CLASSIFIEDS AUTOS CAREERS HOMES



HOME NEWS SPORTS BUSINESS ENTERTAINMENT RECREATION LIVING COMMUNITY

## LOCAL

- Weather
- Columbine

## INSIDE COLUMBINE

### Chronicle

- Police report
- Complete archive
- Timeline: First year
- Shooting chronology
- Flash retrospective

### Multimedia

- Columbine tour
- 911 calls
- 911 dispatches
- 911 transcripts

### Photography

- Columbine tour
- Inside Columbine
- Pulitzer photos

### Other shootings

- Santee, Calif.
- West Paducah, Ky.
- Jonesboro, Ark.
- Springfield, Ore.

PRINT THIS STORY | E-MAIL THIS STORY

## Columbine lawyers want federal probe

By Karen Abbott, News Staff Writer

Colorado U.S. Attorney John Suthers said Thursday that no one has asked him to start a federal grand jury investigation of charges that Jefferson County sheriff's officials have lied about the Columbine shootings.

But several lawyers for Columbine families said a federal probe is the only way to find the truth and they're going to ask Suthers to start one.

"I am going to file a formal request with John Suthers, to initiate a federal grand jury investigation," Barry Arrington, who represents the family of slain Columbine student Daniel Rohrbough, said Thursday.

The Rohrbough family has alleged that a Denver police officer shot their son to death in the chaos outside Columbine High School. They have accused Jefferson County sheriff's officials of covering up what really happened.

Suthers also said, in a statement issued through a spokesman, "Before devoting resources we need to have a reasonable belief that a federal crime has been committed."

Arrington said he has grounds. "The basis for that is the deprivation of constitutional rights... and the cover-up of that," he said.

Arrington also represents several other Columbine families who have said they are frustrated in their quest to know what really happened at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999, and in the activities of killers Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris during the 13 months before the shootings.

Denver U.S. District Judge Lewis Babcock dismissed several families' lawsuits against law enforcement and school officials in November, ruling that the families had not provided evidence that the officials acted egregiously enough to overcome their legal immunity from lawsuits.

Feature

Next  
L

But the families say newly public allegations -- about how Daniel Rohrbough was shot and how Harris wrote detailed plans in a diary months before the shootings, among other things -- do provide the required evidence.

They have asked Babcock to reconsider.

Arrington said a grand jury's subpoena power, and its ability to put witnesses under oath, is the only way the families will obtain the truth.

Two other lawyers for Columbine families agreed.

"They (sheriff's officials) have been hiding evidence not just on the Rohrbough shooting, but on the 13 months that these two kids, Klebold and Harris, were making threats, building bombs, exploding bombs," said Walter Gerash.

Attorney Stephen Wahlberg said, "I strongly feel that the Rohrbough family, and other families -- we, as people -- need to know what happened here."

**January 4, 2002**



2001 © The E.W. Scripps Co.  
**PRIVACY POLICY and USER AGREEMENT**  
Questions? Comments? **TALK TO US.**



## Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_929183,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_929183,00.html)

### Klebolds want Jeffco sheriff to turn over son's clothes

By Karen Abbott, News Staff Writer

Dylan Klebold's parents are fighting in court for their son's clothes, including the black trenchcoat he wore at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999.

Klebold and fellow teen gunman Eric Harris took their own lives that day in the school library after killing 12 students and a teacher and wounding more than 20 other people.

One judge already has ruled that Jefferson County sheriff's officials should keep Klebold's clothing and certain of his writings and drawings. The Klebolds have asked the Colorado Court of Appeals to overrule Jefferson County District Judge Brooke Jackson.

Sheriff's officials contend the clothing and the writings and drawings were used in the commission of a crime. By law, that means law enforcement officials can keep them, they argue.

The writings include drawings of bombs, weaponry and planning notes for the attack with hand signals the two teens could use during the attack, sheriff's officials contend.

They also argue that the clothing helps corroborate the identification of Klebold by witnesses, and that some items of clothing were used to carry or hide weapons.

The black trenchcoat, for example, hid firearms as Klebold entered the school, and he tucked explosives and ammunition in his pants, belt and suspenders, sheriff's officials said in court documents.

The glove Klebold wore on his left hand had its fingertips cut off to make it easier to handle weapons, they said.

But Klebold's parents describe the writings as their son's journals, his math homework and his "doodling."

"They are mostly innocent writings of a teen-age boy, including homework and drawings," they said in court documents.

"The crime was not committed with writings but with guns and bullets," they said.

And they called the purported need for their son's clothing to corroborate witnesses' identification an "absurdity."

"There is no one to 'identify,' " they said.

Besides the trenchcoat and papers, sheriff's officials have kept Klebold's black boots, baseball cap, black pants, belt, black t-shirt and black suspenders. They have returned to Klebold's parents his white socks, blue plaid boxer shorts and samples of his hair, among other things.

Contact Karen Abbott at (303) 892-5188 or [abbottk@RockyMountainNews.com](mailto:abbottk@RockyMountainNews.com).

**January 4, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_929378,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_929378,00.html)

### Owens calls for Columbine grand jury

Governor recommends that county attorney convene special panel

By John Sanko and Charlie Brennan, News Staff Writers

Gov. Bill Owens Thursday called for a grand jury investigation into the Columbine High School shootings.

The governor, who impaneled his own state commission to review the 1999 tragedy, said Jefferson County District Attorney Dave Thomas should convene a grand jury on Columbine.

"I think Dave Thomas should re-examine his earlier decision not to call a grand jury," Owens told a meeting of *Rocky Mountain News* editors and editorial writers.

The governor's comments came the day after four victims' families called for a federal probe into the mass shootings and local law enforcement's response.

Jefferson County District Attorney Dave Thomas has not ruled out convening a grand jury, his spokeswoman, Pam Russell, said. "We are still open."

New questions have come to light over the shooting of 15-year-old Daniel Rohrbough and whether he might have been gunned down accidentally by a Denver police officer rather than Columbine killers Eric Harris or Dylan Klebold.

Rohrbough's family claimed in federal court filings last month that Denver Police Sgt. Dan O'Shea shot their son during the emergency response to the April 20, 1999, massacre of 12 students and teacher Dave Sanders.

Although investigators insist witnesses saw the two killers shoot the boy early in the attack, the Rohrbough family released a tape recording Wednesday they said was Arapahoe County Sheriff's Deputy Jim Taylor saying their son was shot while fleeing the school.

"If he (Taylor) is lying, it's going to forever cloud the results of basically a pretty in-depth study," Owens said.

"I think subpoena powers might be helpful," Owens added. "I think Dave Thomas is probably reconsidering his decision of last March, which came before a number of these (new) allegations had been made."

Barry Arrington, the attorney representing five victim families including the Rohrboughs, said a Jefferson County grand jury investigation "would be wonderful."

"Dave Thomas has had two and a half years to appoint a grand jury, and hasn't. I would encourage a grand jury wherever we can get someone with subpoena power and the ability to place people under oath," Arrington said.

As recently as Dec. 20, Thomas promised Columbine victims' survivors that he would take another look at threats Eric Harris made before the massacre. But he has twice turned down requests from families to launch a grand jury probe.

It may be several days before Arapahoe County Sheriff Pat Sullivan hears the Rohrbough family's secretly recorded tape appearing to contradict Taylor's written statement about his actions at Columbine, which Sullivan released on Monday.

In that statement, Taylor claimed, "It is not true that I saw Daniel Rohrbough get shot or any other person . . ."

Sullivan's Monday press release went on to claim Taylor "was never in a position to witness or hear a weapon being fired" in the vicinity where Rohrbough's body was discovered, and that Taylor "never heard any gun shots on April 20th and never saw any deceased victims on April 20th."

The actions of Taylor that day are pivotal because they could help determine when Daniel Rohrbough was killed, and could potentially undermine the official version of events.

But Arapahoe County officials now say Taylor's comments to the Rohrbough family reflect only what he had seen on television or in newspapers.

Nevertheless, Sullivan is anxious to hear the Rohrbough family's tape that purports to catch Taylor in a flat contradiction of his official statement.

"It's obviously pretty informative, there's no doubt about that," Sullivan said, referring to those portions of the tape that have appeared in the media.

"But I want to know the whole context of what was going on. We need to hear the whole thing."

Rohrbough is setting conditions the sheriff must meet before reviewing the entire 2 1/2-hour tape.

"My position is going to be that there's some information in his office that he has never released," Rohrbough said. "There's a couple dozen police reports from his officers that have never been released" which substantiate Taylor being in position to see Daniel Rohrbough being shot.

"I'd like a confirmation of that information from Sheriff Sullivan, before the entire tape is released to him," Rohrbough said.

Owens does not have the authority to call a statewide grand jury. Attorney General Ken Salazar does, but he said a state grand jury typically is called where there are allegations of local corruption, which he said was not true in the present case.

The governor could name a special prosecutor but said he did not think that was appropriate.

Owens noted that a grand jury would have subpoena powers to compel testimony that his special Columbine commission, headed by former Colorado Supreme Court Chief Justice William Erickson, did not.

The commission released a 200-page report last May that was highly critical of the way the incident was handled, claiming the two killers were given "free rein" of the school for 46 minutes and no effort was made to "engage, contain or capture" the killers.

Its report was criticized by Sheriff Stone, who blasted it as "inaccurate and irresponsible."

Stone refused to testify before the commission during its 10 months of hearings.

*Staff writers Karen Abbott and Kevin Vaughan contributed to this report. Contact John Sanko at (303) 892-5404 or at [sankoj@RockyMountainNews.com](mailto:sankoj@RockyMountainNews.com).*

**January 4, 2002**

— Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

# Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_933398,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_933398,00.html)

## Official to receive grand jury request

By Jeff Kass, News Staff Writer

Colorado's U.S. attorney will receive a request today for a federal grand jury investigation into the Columbine High School shootings, according to an attorney representing the families of some victims.

Victims' families publicly called for such a probe last week, shortly after they filed a motion to reinstate the federal lawsuit that was dismissed last year.

Barry Arrington, attorney for five families, said in a news release that he will deliver the letter to U.S. Attorney John Suthers asking him "to investigate the cover-up of possible violations of federal law by the Jefferson County sheriff's department."

The release said the violations are reflected in the federal lawsuit.

That lawsuit said that police failed to catch warning signs leading up to Columbine, and botched the law enforcement response once the shooting started.

Jeff Dorschner, spokesman for Suthers, said the U.S. attorney would examine Arrington's letter before making any detailed comment.

"Anything that that would support their accusations (and) support their request for an investigation would be helpful," Dorschner said.

Jacki Taliman, spokeswoman for the sheriff's department, said she respected the right of the victims' families to request a grand jury.

But if a grand jury were to convene, she said, "I don't believe that the findings will be anything new.

"I think it (the sheriff's official report) was an incredibly thorough investigation. We stand behind our findings."

**January 8, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

## Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_933203,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_933203,00.html)

### Deputy admits to Columbine tape

Sheriff says written statement on shooting of Rohrbough was true but that recording isn't

By Kevin Vaughan, News Staff Writer

A sheriff's deputy has acknowledged that it is his voice on controversial tape recordings in which he claimed to have seen a student shot at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999.

Arapahoe County Sheriff Pat Sullivan said he has heard the eight short sections of the tape that were played last week for reporters after Deputy Jim Taylor issued a written statement denying that he'd seen any of the victims wounded in the school tragedy.

"It is Taylor's voice, and he has admitted that it is him on those pieces," Sullivan said Monday.

Sullivan was asked how the tape recording matched Taylor's written statement, which was given Dec. 31.

"It doesn't," Sullivan said.

However, Sullivan said he believes Taylor was telling the truth when he denied seeing anyone get shot.

The Dec. 31 statement "is solid," Sullivan said.

"It is the truth," he said. "What's on the tape isn't."

If Taylor did see Rohrbough get shot, it would call into question the official timeline of events issued by the Jefferson County sheriff's department, which has determined that Rohrbough was killed by Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris in the first minutes of the rampage, before any law enforcement officers arrived.

Taylor, who has been with the department since 1988, remained on administrative leave Monday. He did not return a message left at his home.

The controversy came in the wake of a Dec. 26 court filing in which the family of Daniel Rohrbough named a Denver police officer as the alleged killer of the boy. In that court filing, the Rohrbough family cited as evidence statements made by Taylor to the boy's mother and stepfather, Sue and Rich Petrone.

They alleged that Taylor had told them he had seen Rohrbough get shot outside the school just after arriving.

Five days later, Sullivan's office issued a press release, claiming that Taylor was never in a position to see anyone get shot at the school. It also claimed that "Deputy Taylor states that he has not said anything to the Rohrbough family that could lead them to believe he witnessed any shots being fired at Columbine."

Then came the release of sections of the tape.

In them, Taylor talked about seeing a boy get shot in the chaos at the school. He told the Petrones that "It was Dan, and I didn't know that until I seen the photo the next morning in the newspaper that it was the boy that I seen."

That same day, Sullivan's office released Taylor's written Dec. 31 statement.

Sullivan said he could not discuss the conflict between the two statements because it is under investigation.

In the meantime, Sullivan and members of Rohrbough's family have agreed to meet Friday.

Sullivan has asked that he be allowed to hear the entire tape-recorded discussion involving the Patrones and Taylor and his wife.

But the boy's father, Brian Rohrbough, said, "I'm not going to release the full tape at this time."

Contact Kevin Vaughan at (303) 892-5019 or [vaughank@RockyMountainNews.com](mailto:vaughank@RockyMountainNews.com).

**January 8, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

## Grand jury in rampage sought

By Kieran Nicholson and Mike McPhee  
Denver Post Staff Writers

**Tuesday, January 08, 2002** - The attorney representing the families of five Columbine High School shooting victims says he will ask today for a federal grand jury to review the highly criticized investigation of the April 1999 rampage.

Attorney Barry Arrington said Monday that he would ask U.S. Attorney John Suthers to convene a grand jury to investigate "the coverup of possible violations of federal law by the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department."

Arrington said he would ask that the grand jury, which has subpoena powers, look specifically at the "coverup. . . . We've been lied to so many times."

Jeff Dorschner, spokesman for the U.S. attorney's office, said the office heard about the request but had no comment. Suthers, he said, "will look at the material, probably huddle with his staff and consider the request. There is no formal process for this."

In other developments, the Governor's Columbine Review Commission will meet again, and Arrington and Brian Rohrbough, one of the victims' parents, are to meet Friday with Arapahoe County Sheriff Pat Sullivan, at Sullivan's request, to discuss controversial tapes made of one of his deputies.

Rohrbough, who has maintained that friendly fire at Columbine killed his 15-year-old son, Daniel, said a recording of Deputy Jim Taylor supports that theory. Rohrbough said the tape was secretly recorded 11 months after the shootings at the home of Sue Patrone, Daniel's mother.

Taylor was a longtime Rohrbough family friend.

Sullivan said he hopes to obtain a copy of the tape.

"What Deputy Taylor told the families (on tape) was misleading," said Sullivan. "What he told the Sheriff's Office was accurate."

Taylor, 42, an officer since 1988, has been placed on paid administrative leave.

"There is an ongoing investigation into the matter," said Sullivan.

The five families represented by Arrington sued the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office for a variety of constitutional violations. But U.S. District Chief Judge Lewis Babcock dismissed the lawsuit in November, ruling that law-enforcement officials who responded to the massacre acted within the scope of their professional duties.

That prompted Celine Marquez, a Jefferson County School District administrator, to come forward and say that Denver Police Sgt. Dan O'Shea admitted to her he was afraid he had shot and killed Daniel Rohrbough.

With that new information, Arrington filed a motion asking Babcock to reconsider his dismissal. He named O'Shea as Rohrbough's killer. Babcock has yet to rule on the motion.

Meanwhile, William Erickson, a former chief justice of the Colorado Supreme Court who headed the

governor's commission, said Monday that the commission will meet in the near future, but he would not say when, where or what actions would be taken.

"When the commission does take action, it will be made public," said Erickson.

And while Brian Rohrbough said he would welcome an investigation by the Jefferson County coroner, no one has asked for one, coroner Carl Blesch confirmed.

Blesch said he hasn't been approached about an inquiry but would consider it "only if it doesn't affect a broader investigation, such as a grand jury, that would have more power."

Advantages of a coroner's inquiry, Rohrbough said, would be that it is public, it puts people under oath and allows questions to be submitted by outside people.

[Printable View](#)

[Email a Copy of this Article](#)

[Return to top](#)

## Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/news\\_columnists/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_86\\_934537,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/news_columnists/article/0,1299,DRMN_86_934537,00.html)

### Johnson: Nothing's funny about Columbine lles



Bill Johnson

It would be, were not so many innocent children dead, comical.

If there's any laughter, it must be coming from hell, from those two boys who did the killing, in their delight over still more good people being taken down.

Quick memo to Arapahoe County Sheriff Pat Sullivan: Stay out of this Columbine mess. Remember Boulder and JonBenet. Talk to Alex Hunter and Tom Koby -- if you've forgotten. One way or the other, your deputy, Jim Taylor, is lying.

A headlong rush to stand by him -- to stick by his initial written report when his own, tape-recorded words contradict it -- will serve only to strip away your integrity. Ultimately, as the Boulder boys discovered, it can cost you your job.

Join the rest of us. Just say you don't know, exactly, what happened at the high school that afternoon when the bullets were flying.

For goodness sake, don't start helping Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone try to put the square peg into the round hole that is his bungled investigation into the murders that day.

We had him surrounded in the newspaper the other day, ensnared in what the victims' families call a "pattern of obstruction and falsification." Simply put, it means he's been lying some.

**His story** is he and his guys did everything right that day nearly three years ago. And he's sticking by it. Again, at his peril.

Every cop, detective and prosecutor called out that day attempted their level best, performed as well as their experience and training allowed them. Most had never before encountered such heinousness. And did some make mistakes? Of course they did.

John Stone wants us to believe it all went flawlessly, as if we couldn't or wouldn't understand that it, well, didn't turn out that way.

"We were confronted," he could have said, "with something unimaginable, and if mistakes were made, they were honest. Here's the truth of what happened. We did our level best."

Why is this not in the law-enforcement lexicon? There is no shame in it. Why does it require judges, courts, lawyers and juries to discover simple truth?

Why this rush to flat believe what Jim Taylor has told you? He says in his report he never was in a position to see kids get shot. He tells his wife, in detail, how he saw one go down. He repeats it on two occasions to Brian Rohrbough and his ex-wife, Sue Petrone, the last of which they tape-record.

He then tells you he never said such a thing. OK, he says, when the tape comes out, it's him talking. But he's just making that stuff up from what he'd read and seen on TV.

And once again, he's telling you in writing he saw nothing.

"It's solid," you're now saying of his latest version, never once addressing why he might look those grieving parents in the eye and say the opposite. I hope you're tougher with suspected criminals in your jail.

**What to do:** Back away. Join with Barry Arrington, attorney for five victims' families, in calling for a federal probe of what happened. Say you just want to clear the air, to learn -- as the rest of us want to do -- what really happened.

The events of that April day were horrific enough. Covering up the truth, misdirecting it or flat ignoring it only victimizes further those already and so deeply wounded.

Again, remember Boulder.

Time, I've always believed, has an uncanny way of outing truth. And it should be sought after and welcomed. Never feared.

*Bill Johnson's column appears Saturday, Wednesday and Friday. [wkjohnson1@msn.com](mailto:wkjohnson1@msn.com) or (303) 892-2763.*

**January 9, 2002**

**MORE JOHNSON COLUMNS »**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

## Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_934461,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_934461,00.html)

### Federal Columbine probe sought

Five families request an investigation into claim that officer's bullet killed student

By Kevin Vaughan, News Staff Writer

Five Columbine families on Tuesday formally asked for a federal investigation into allegations that a police bullet killed a student at the school and that Jefferson County authorities have lied to cover it up.

The questions center on the death of student Daniel Rohrbough outside Columbine on April 20, 1999, and on his family's charges that they have been lied to in 29 instances by officials at the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office.

"All my clients want is the truth," said attorney Barry Arrington, who represents the families of five students who died in the school tragedy. "The truth is the one thing they have been denied."

Arrington hand-delivered a three-page letter to U.S. Attorney John Suthers seeking the new investigation.

To take the allegations to a grand jury, Suthers would have to believe that violations of federal law occurred.

Suthers "is reviewing the allegations contained in the letter to ascertain whether there is a reasonable basis to believe that a federal crime has been committed," said his spokesman, Jeff Dorschner.

Suthers will meet with officials at the FBI, which was involved in the initial investigation and in the collection of evidence at the school.

"No timetable has been established for a response," Dorschner said.

Jackie Tallman, spokeswoman for the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, said the department had no problem with the request of the families.

"I respect their choice to move forward and do that," she said.

The department would cooperate with any federal investigation, Tallman said.

Arrington's request to Suthers comes less than two weeks after his clients filed new court papers that, for the first time, named Denver police Sgt. Dan O'Shea as the alleged killer of Rohrbough. Those filings cited a sworn statement by a former Jefferson County Public Schools administrator that O'Shea told her two days after the tragedy that he feared he had shot an innocent student.

In addition to the Rohrbough family, Arrington represents the parents of Lauren Townsend, Kelly Fleming, Matthew Kechter and Kyle Velasquez, who were all murdered in the school library.

Their initial lawsuits against Jefferson County officials were dismissed in December by a federal judge, and their recent filings marked their first effort to get them reinstated.

Arrington said he and the families are open to other ways to answer questions about Columbine, including

a state legislative panel and a coroner's inquest.

"Every single angle we can possibly pursue to get at the truth we will pursue," Arrington said.

The legislative panel, which has been discussed, would amount to a panel with subpoena powers and the ability to take testimony under oath.

A coroner's inquest, which has been discussed as another avenue, would also give officials the ability to subpoena witnesses and documents and to take testimony under oath. It also would be an open proceeding -- something that appeals to families.

"It's been an uphill battle and I don't know that we'll ever get to the bottom of it," Arrington said. "If we don't get subpoena power and the right to put people under oath, we may never get to the bottom of it."

Arapahoe County sheriff's Deputy Jim Taylor remained on paid administrative leave Tuesday while officials continued to investigate tape-recorded statements he made to Rohrbough's family about 11 months after Columbine.

In those statements, Taylor claimed he saw Rohrbough fall to the ground after being shot. He also said that when he read the *Rocky Mountain News* the next morning, he realized the boy in a photograph of Rohrbough's body on a sidewalk outside the school was the same student he had seen shot.

But on Dec. 31, Taylor claimed he never saw any such thing and never told the family that he had.

Arrington refuted that assertion, questioning why Taylor, a family friend of more than 20 years, would make up the story he told Rohrbough's parents on three separate occasions.

"Deputy Taylor was friends with the Rohrboughs," Arrington said. "What possible motive would he have for telling a lie like this?"

"It would be cruel. It would be monstrous."

In addition, Arrington noted, the tape recording includes some statements made by Taylor's wife, who said the officer came home on April 20, 1999, and told her the same story.

Some answers may come from 790 pages of Columbine documents from the Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office that were released Tuesday to Randy and Judy Brown.

The Browns, critics of the Columbine investigation since Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone named their son as a potential suspect, were examining them Tuesday night to see if they had been included among the more than 16,500 pages of Columbine documents released so far.

"If they had this stuff to do their report and they didn't include it, why not?" Randy Brown asked. "And if they didn't have these pages, how could the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office do a complete report?"

Finally, some members of Gov. Bill Owens' Columbine Review Commission -- which officially went out of business on Dec. 31 -- may discuss whether there's more work to be done.

However, William Erickson, the commission's chairman and the former chief justice of the state Supreme Court, said it's unlikely the group would do anything other than talk about how to put some of their recommendations into place.

"There may be some implementation work, but that will be the extent of it," he said Tuesday.

Contact Kevin Vaughan at (303) 892-5019 or [vaughank@RockyMountainNews.com](mailto:vaughank@RockyMountainNews.com).

**January 9, 2002**

• Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

# Columbine kin request U.S. probe

## Federal grand jury urged

By Mike McPhee  
Denver Post Staff Writer

The families of five Columbine shooting victims Tuesday asked for a federal grand jury to look into an alleged coverup of the investigation of the 1999 rampage.

U.S. Attorney John Suthers didn't comment after receiving the request from attorney Barry Arrington, but Suthers' spokesman, Jeff Dorschner, said Suthers is reviewing the request, looking for a reasonable belief that any federal crime has been committed.

"The U.S. attorney is planning on meeting with the FBI, which has been involved in the Columbine investigation and the evidence col-

lection from the very beginning. He will also consult with the Department of Justice Office of Civil Rights in Washington regarding possible legal theories," he said. There is no timetable, Dorschner said.

In his request, Arrington said "local law enforcement is not able to make a candid assessment of its own activities. There can simply be no question that the 'official report' issued by the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department is false in many important respects.

"Moreover, for reasons that are unclear at this time, the Arapahoe

Please see COLUMBINE on 3B

# Families ask U.S. attorney to seat federal grand jury

COLUMBINE from Page 1B

County Sheriff's Department has released false statements regarding the activities of its personnel and statements they have made."

Arapahoe County Sheriff Pat Sullivan said serious questions have arisen about Deputy Jim Taylor's truthfulness in statements he made to his superiors and to the family of shooting victim Daniel Rollins.

In March 2000, nearly a year after Columbine, Taylor was secretly recorded saying he saw the shooting. Yet on Dec. 31, Taylor made a written statement that he never saw anyone shot at Columbine.

The conflict is significant because Jefferson County investigators concluded all students were shot before any law enforcement officers arrived on scene.

"This is very serious. I'll be very disappointed if one of our staff lied to a victim's family," Sullivan said.

Arrington, in his grand jury request, wrote, "There can no longer be any doubt, therefore, that the only way the truth will ever be known is if an independent body — with subpoena power and the power to place witnesses under oath on penalty of perjury — conducts an investigation into the shootings."

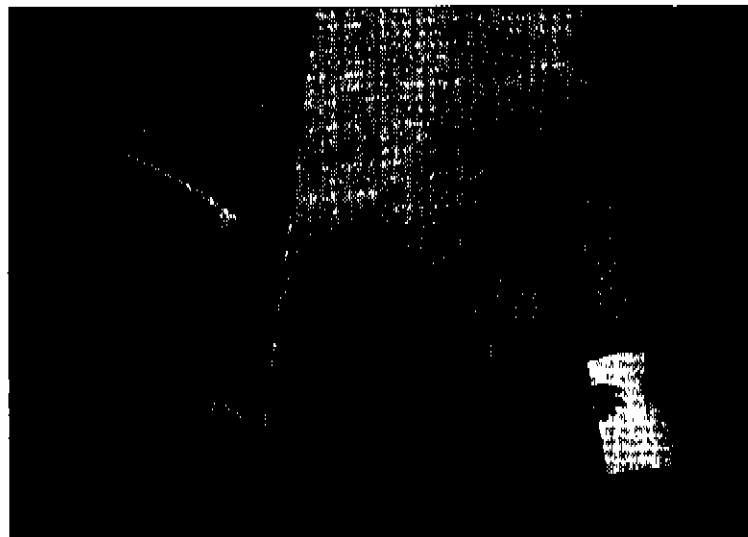
Arrington compared Columbine with the Rodney King case, in which California officials failed to prosecute police for beating King. The case was turned over to federal prosecutors, who successfully prosecuted, Arrington said.

Arrington also said he is working with state legislators in hopes of convening a legislative commission, also with subpoena power, to look into the investigation by the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office of the April 20, 1999, shootings.

A legislative commission would be his first choice, Arrington said.

"They have subpoena power, everything they do is out in the open."

And the results, one way or the other, are made public," he said. "The problem with a federal grand jury



The Denver Post / Brian Braherd

Attorney Barry Arrington speaks to the media Tuesday after delivering a letter to the U.S. attorney's office in Denver, requesting a federal grand jury to probe police actions in the Columbine case.

is that the investigation remains secret unless the grand jury indicts."

State Rep. Don Lee, R-Littleton, who represents the district that includes Columbine, has been researching the issue, and said he may propose such a panel.

"I'm trying to be judicious," Lee said. "It's important not to wield that power too easy too fast."

Legislators have several options. Either the House or the Senate can create its own panel with a majority vote, or they can vote to create a joint panel. If lawmakers agree to create such a panel, it would be the first of its kind in recent memory.

Arrington said one Jefferson County sheriff's deputy has told him that people in the department would come forward with information "that would blow the roof off" the investigation, but fear they would lose their jobs. A grand jury would allow them to testify without retribution.

Likewise, a state grand jury could hear testimony in secret, but its investigative files, including

lists of witnesses, become public if an indictment is issued, said Pam Russell, spokeswoman for Jefferson County District Attorney Dave Thomas.

Denver Post staff writer Trent Selbert contributed to this report.

# Let trust, truth shine

**A**fter nearly three years, and after more than an abundance of choices, here is the way that justice ought to go in the Columbine High School investigation:

Coloradans ought to put the verdict in the hands of — and, more importantly, in the mind and the heart of — a good man.

The final judgment ought to rest with a man we can trust.

That man is Bill Erickson.



**Chuck  
Green**

Bill Erickson was chosen, and rightly so, by Gov. Bill Owens as the man we can trust.

He was the right man for the right job, but unfortunately our

governor didn't put his full trust into the man he told all the rest of Colorado that we could trust.

He should have.

And maybe, some day, he will. Back then, it was the right decision, but it shouldn't have been so half-hearted. The governor should have given Bill Erickson all the tools to do the job.

Maybe that's what the governor intended to do, but that's not what he did do. He gave Erickson the job, but he didn't give him the fully equipped tool box to get the job done.

He has one more chance to do it right.

Bill Owens needs to reinstitute the Governor's Columbine Review Commission, headed by Erickson, with the power to subpoena witnesses to testify under oath, with the penalty of perjury hanging like a guillotine over their necks.

Please, governor, let Bill Erickson's commission seek the truth, in full public glare.

Let the truth come through.

Here is my case:

If the investigation goes to a federal grand jury, the testimony will be secret — just like the Rocky Flats grand jury, whose findings were muzzled.

And if it goes to a county grand jury, no one will believe what the jury does — just as happened in the case of the Jon-Benet Ramsey murder case.

And if it goes back to the Erickson commission, without the authority to subpoena testimony under oath, it will have no credibility and no thoroughness — just as it did the last time.

But you, governor, and only you, can do it right.

You have one more chance.

You can put the investigation back into the hands of a trusted man — Bill Erickson — and you can give him and his colleagues the tools to do the job right.

It can be done in public.

It can be done under oath.

It can be done with full credibility, with full disclosure, with full discovery, with full public oversight.

This time, it can be done right.

— not half right.

Colorado deserves to have this national nightmare put to rest — not buried in a tomb of lies and deceit and suspicion and distrust, as Sheriff Stone-wall would have it, but put to rest under a headstone that reads:

## **HERE LIES THE TRUTH**

The victims are dead and gone, but don't let them die under the dark cloud of lies and suspicion. Let them go with the serene belief of their mothers and fathers and sisters and brothers and classmates that the truth was known.

You are, Bill Owens, our governor.

Live up to our expectations that your standard is as high as ours, and let the truth shine forth.

You have the power to expose the truth, and you have the power to share it with the people you serve.

That's why you have the power, and that's why we entrusted you with it.

Now use it as it was intended, and don't pretend that it is someone else's responsibility.

Otherwise, don't run for another term.

# New Columbine detail alleged

By Barry Bortnick  
The Gazette

**DEVELOP** — An anonymous member of the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department reportedly said others in the department could "blow the lid" off the Columbine High School investigation, according to an attorney representing victims' families.

Barry Arrington, who represents the parents of Daniel Rohrbough, one of the teenagers killed during the April 20, 1999, massacre, said the source said people inside the Sheriff's Department will come forward with "important evidence" if subpoenaed

## Lawyer claims to have secret source

by a grand jury.

The source said the insiders refused to speak out for fear of losing their jobs, Arrington said.

Arrington never identified the source. He said he can not be certain the person is with the Sheriff's Department.

A spokeswoman with the department said she is unaware of anyone who has additional information about the massacre.

Arrington included the anonymous source's claims in

a formal request for a federal grand jury into accusations Rohrbough was accidentally killed by a police officer.

The parents of four students slain at Columbine High School called for a federal investigation this month. They say a Denver police officer accidentally shot Rohrbough.

The families also allege the Sheriff's Department tried to cover up the truth behind the teen's death.

Daniel's father, Brian Rohrbough, released statements at

legedly made by an Arapahoe County sheriff's deputy who reportedly indicated Daniel died from friendly fire.

The families hope these issues will force U.S. Attorney John Suthers to empanel a grand jury.

"Local law enforcement is not able to make a candid assessment of its own activities," Arrington said in a letter submitted Tuesday to Suthers.

"The only way the truth will ever be known is if an independent body — with subpoena

na power — conducts an investigation."

Suthers will review the new allegations and determine whether there is a reasonable basis to believe a federal crime occurred, said Jeff Dorschner, a spokesman with the U.S. Attorney's Office. Suthers will also meet with the FBI and consult with the Department of Justice's Office of Civil Rights before deciding about the grand jury.

The Rohrboughs and other Columbine victims also want the Colorado Legislature to form an investigative commission into Daniel's death, Arrington said.

**sections**  
metro | obits  
business  
life | go!  
sports | weather

**online features**  
ap wire | msnbc  
cinema guide  
gazette services  
quick facts

**market place**  
classified  
careers | coupons  
real estate | auto  
print ads online

**Subscribe Today!**



January 10, 2002

## Columbine talk costs deputy his job

### Sheriff says family got false information

The Associated Press

LITTLETON - A sheriff's deputy was fired Wednesday because he gave conflicting statements about the shooting of a teenager during the 1999 Columbine High School massacre.

Arapahoe County Sheriff Pat Sullivan said an internal investigation determined that Deputy Jim Taylor provided false information several times to the family of slain student Daniel Rohrbough and others. He said Taylor decided not to appeal the case.

Sue Petrone, Rohrbough's mother, said Taylor, a family friend, told her and her former husband, Brian Rohrbough, shortly after the tragedy and several times later that he saw the teen killed.

"He had absolutely no reason to lie to me or to Brian," Petrone said. "He was telling me the truth. I saw his face."

She said Taylor's wife, Pam, also told her that Taylor returned home the night of the tragedy and said he had seen a boy killed.

In March 2000, Petrone secretly recorded Taylor as he told her again during a dinner party he saw a boy fall to the ground after apparently being shot. Taylor said he realized it was the 15-year-old Rohrbough after seeing newspaper photos of him.

In a Dec. 31 statement, Taylor said he didn't see the shooting and told the Petrones only what he had seen on television and read in newspapers.

Sullivan said radio tapes prove Taylor was not in a position to see gunfire or Daniel Rohrbough during the attack.

"I am extremely disappointed that false information regarding the tragedy of Columbine High School was provided to the families of the victims of Columbine by a member of my staff," Sullivan said. "I sincerely apologize for the unacceptable conduct of one former member of my organization."

The families claim a police officer accidentally shot Rohrbough as he fled the school during the April 20, 1999, massacre. They asked that a federal grand jury investigate their claims authorities have covered up evidence.

At a news conference last week, Rohrbough's father, Brian, played a tape recording of a voice he identified as Taylor describing the shooting recorded at the dinner.



**Western  
BEAUTY &  
HEALTH  
CENTER**



**NE  
HOI  
CONNE**

"You could hear glass breaking, you could see kids running everywhere, and that's when I see the boy coming down the sidewalk, you know, and I see him just fall down," the voice says.

Copyright 2002, The Gazette, a Freedom Communications, Inc. Company. All rights reserved. Contact

us.

## Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_935741,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_935741,00.html)

### Secret Columbine Inquiry

Jeffco school officials conduct probe as they girded for lawsuits; only copy of report locked up

By Kevin Vaughan, News Staff Writer

Jefferson County school officials conducted an internal, in-depth investigation of the Columbine High School tragedy as they prepared to defend themselves in court.

But today that report remains locked in a lawyer's office, protected by state laws that make almost all attorney-client communications off-limits to the public.

Still, Bill Kowalski, an attorney for Jefferson County Public Schools, said district officials have nothing to hide and have struggled to balance their legal obligation with their belief in openness.

"It's our feeling and it's the school district's feeling that the public has a right to know what's going on in the school district and what was going on at Columbine High School," Kowalski said Wednesday.

But he also said that in a "culture of litigation" the district officials named in lawsuits "have rights to be protected, and our job as lawyers in these instances is to protect their rights."

School district officials refused this week to release a copy of the investigative report to the *Rocky Mountain News*, which sought the document under the Colorado Open Records Act.

The *News* sought the report in an effort to answer lingering questions about what school officials knew of killers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold -- and when they knew it.

For example, Columbine Principal Frank DeAngelis has maintained publicly that school officials had no inkling of the anger Harris and Klebold carried with them before they attacked their classmates and teachers on April 20, 1999.

"They never expressed that with anyone," DeAngelis said in a June 1999 conference on safe schools.

But that is contrasted with other documents among the blizzard of papers released in the last 14 months by Jefferson County and other authorities.

One document, included in Jefferson County's voluminous case file and released again this week by Arapahoe County authorities, showed that one of the school's deans, Peter Horvath, had told an administrator he feared Harris was "on the edge of (losing) control."

Horvath also said in an interview with investigators that he had dealt with Klebold in the spring of 1998 after the boy was caught scratching "something" into a freshman's locker.

Horvath took Klebold to the office and watched as the boy became "very agitated" while waiting for his father to come to the school.

"Dylan advised that he was very upset with the school system and the way CHS handled people, to include

the people that picked on him and others," the report said.

The district's assertion that the investigative report falls under attorney-client privilege stems from the fact that it was prepared as officials anticipated lawsuits in the wake of the Columbine tragedy.

"It's a very strong privilege, and very difficult to pierce," said Denver attorney Scott Robinson.

Kowalski said district officials began considering the likelihood that they would be sued almost as soon as they heard that gunfire had erupted at Columbine.

"My instincts certainly told me there were going to be lawsuits, before I knew much more than kids were seriously injured and killed," Kowalski said.

On April 27, 1999, Kowalski saw a news report that the family of Isalah Shoels, a student killed in the school library, had spoken with an attorney and was considering a lawsuit.

At that point, the district launched the investigation. It was carried out by a district employee, whom Kowalski declined to identify.

The investigative report, which Kowalski estimated included interviews with two dozen members of Columbine's staff who knew Harris and Klebold, was finished on April 26, 2000. It has been seen only by the member of the security staff who wrote it, his supervisor and the district's attorneys.

The only copy of the report is in Kowalski's office.

"By the time the thing was finalized, the lawsuits were in place -- the district and individuals had been sued," he said.

All of those lawsuits against the district have been dismissed by a federal judge. However, time still remains for them to be revived, either through a motion for reconsideration or through a formal appeal.

The existence of the school district's investigation came to light as the Columbine tragedy is, again, front-page news. In recent weeks have come allegations that a Denver police officer fired the shot that killed one of the victims and questions about the tape-recorded story of an Arapahoe County sheriff's deputy, who claimed to have seen the boy die and then later changed his story.

Kowalski said the investigative report contains damage estimates for Columbine, copies of sheriff's documents and such things as school records of Harris and Klebold.

He estimated that it is "a couple hundred" pages long.

Kowalski hedged when asked whether the school district changed any policies or procedures as a result of what officials learned from their own investigation.

"It comes under the category of wanting to show people that we don't have anything to hide without divulging what we consider to be privileged information under the law," he said.

"I think it is safe to say that there have been hours of discussions in the school and in the school district about those types of issues," Kowalski said.

For example, he said school officials have conducted training sessions on bullying and on assessing the threats that exist in their buildings.

"I don't think there is anything generally different in this investigation that hasn't been out there in the public," Kowalski said. "More school district employees appeared in front of the governor's commission, I believe, than probably all other witnesses combined.

"We've been open."

Still, Randy and Judy Brown, whose two children attended the school and who have publicly battled with Jefferson County officials, said they were shocked to learn of the investigation and disappointed that the report wasn't open to the public.

"How can we learn our lessons if we don't know the truth about what happened in that school?" Judy Brown asked Wednesday.

*Contact Kevin Vaughan at (303) 892-5019 or [vaughank@RockyMountainNews.com](mailto:vaughank@RockyMountainNews.com).*

**January 10, 2002**

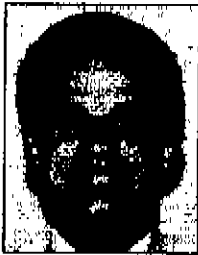
Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

# Deputy in Columbine case fired

- Sheriff: Taylor admits lying to families; Rohrbough kin call confession a ruse

By Mike McPhee and Kieran Nicholson  
Denver Post Staff Writers

**Thursday, January 10, 2002** - Arapahoe County Deputy Jim Taylor was fired Wednesday after admitting he lied to the family of Columbine victim Daniel Rohrbough about what he saw at the school April 20, 1999.



## Taylor Investigation

An internal-affairs investigation by the Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office determined Deputy Jim Taylor violated five policies and procedures, and that led to his firing Wednesday:

### Compliance with Sheriff's Office value-based directive system

Because the deputy admitted to providing false information on several occasions to the family of Daniel Rohrbough and others, he failed to demonstrate organizational integrity and respect for others.

### Truthfulness

While the false information provided to the family of Daniel Rohrbough was done in "off-duty" environments, the false statements were specifically related to the responsibilities of a deputy sheriff.

### Respect for others

The deputy admitted to providing false information to the family of Daniel Rohrbough and the deputy admitted that the false information resulted in aggravating a controversial situation and caused continued distrust.

Providing false information demonstrated a serious lack of respect for those directly and indirectly involved in this matter.

### Public trust and authority

By providing false information on several occasions, the high level of trust expected by the public of their law enforcement authorities and the criminal-justice system has been seriously impacted.

### Conduct

By knowingly and repeatedly providing false information to the family of Daniel

Taylor, 42 - a 14-year veteran of the Sheriff's Office - was secretly recorded by Rohrbough's mother, saying he saw 15-year-old Daniel shot and killed at Columbine.

But last week, after portions of that tape were made public, Taylor told internal-affairs investigators that he "never witnessed weapons being fired, never heard gunfire and never saw deceased victims at the school," according to Sheriff Pat Sullivan, who issued a statement Wednesday afternoon.

A full internal-affairs investigation also determined that Taylor's comments to Rohrbough's family, on at least four occasions, were false.

Taylor and his wife, Pam, declined to comment. He will not appeal the firing, according to Sullivan's statement.

"I am extremely disappointed that false information regarding the tragedy of Columbine High School was provided to the families of the victims of Columbine by a member of my staff," Sullivan said in the statement. "I sincerely apologize for the unacceptable conduct of one former member of my organization."

Sullivan could not be reached for further comment.

Rohrbough's family says Taylor told the truth on the tape and made his false statements to the Sheriff's Office.

"There is no doubt in my mind that Jim Taylor was telling us the truth when he talked to us," Rich Petrone, Daniel's stepfather, said Wednesday. "If you could have seen his face, there was no way he was lying."

Taylor had told Petrone the same version of the story one day after the shootings, Petrone said. Daniel's parents - Sue Petrone and Brian Rohrbough - had known Taylor for years.

Rich Petrone suggested the Sheriff's Office is withholding facts.

"Something's going on," Petrone said. "It's a sad state of affairs

Rohrbough and others, the reputation of the Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office and other law-enforcement organizations has been inappropriately brought into disrepute. Providing false information has discredited the reputations of members of the organization and has had a negative impact upon the operational effectiveness of the Sheriff's Office and its members.

Source: Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office

The Denver Post

when the cops hide the truth. It's unbelievable."

Prior to the release of the transcript, Taylor's taped statements had been referred to in court filings and news stories.

Sullivan is to meet Friday with Brian Rohrbough and Rohrbough's attorney, Barry Arrington, to discuss the tape. Sullivan has said he wants a complete copy, not just a transcript of the portions already made public.

"This whole thing is sad," Arrington said. "I just wish he had told the truth. I'm not pleased that it came to this."

The Rohrboughs sued the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office in federal court, claiming Daniel was killed by police fire and not by shooters Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. The federal suit was dismissed, but the family has filed a motion to reinstate it.

In a court motion Dec. 26, Rohrbough and Arrington named Denver police Sgt. Dan O'Shea as the officer who killed Daniel.

That motion claims Taylor "specifically remembers that when he arrived in the lower student parking lot, a Denver police officer was there somewhere to his left, and he remembers hearing the sound of machine gun fire. Deputy Taylor saw a boy (whom he later was able to identify as Daniel Rohrbough) running at a fast trot down the sidewalk with a group of children, and he saw this boy get shot and drop to the ground."

On Wednesday, the Rohrbough family asked that a federal grand jury be called to investigate Columbine.

During his years with the Sheriff's Office, Taylor - a senior deputy when he was fired - was never before the subject of an internal-affairs investigation and "performed his responsibilities in an excellent manner," according to Sullivan's statement.

[Printable View](#)

[Email a Copy of this Article](#)

[Return to top](#)

## Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_939907,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_939907,00.html)

### Talk with Harris' parents unlikely, DA says

Jeffco prosecutor releases 2 letters to killer's parents

By Lynn Bartels, News Staff Writer

Investigators are unlikely to interview the parents of Columbine gunman Eric Harris any time soon, Jefferson County District Attorney Dave Thomas says.

He didn't say why, but two letters he wrote to Wayne and Kathy Harris' attorneys indicate that the parents want a guarantee that their statements won't be used against them.

Thomas last week released the letters at the request of the *Rocky Mountain News*, which sought them under the Colorado Open Records Act.

Thomas twice refused to release the documents, in April and in September of 2001. The *News* last December asked Thomas to reconsider and he did.

In a letter dated Jan. 9, the district attorney explained why he had changed his position.

"At the time of the original requests, there were ongoing discussions relating to the possibility of further interviews with the Harrises," Thomas said. "I felt that making these letters public could have jeopardized those discussions.

"However, at this time, there are no further discussions about additional interviews, and I do not contemplate the resumption of any such discussions."

Attorney Benjamin Colkitt III, who represents the Harrises, did not return calls.

Eric Harris, 18, and Dylan Klebold, 17, stormed Columbine High School on April 20, 1999, killing a teacher and 12 students before killing themselves.

Their families have never publicly talked, but videos and writings the boys made in the months before the attack show they stockpiled weapons, made bombs and planned the rampage under their parents' noses.

The *News* also sought any correspondence between the district attorney and Tom and Sue Klebold's attorneys, but Thomas said there was none. He said there were only two letters to the Harrises.

"We are at a stage now that you have requested some assurances from me with respect to my use of statements made by your clients," Thomas said in an undated letter to the Harrises' attorneys.

"It is our position that I am not in a position to make any promises or concessions with respect to statements made by your clients."

A second letter, dated Feb. 21, 2001, is more detailed.

"What benefit do I and this office derive from an agreement that no statements by Wayne or Kathy Harris would ever be used against them in a criminal case?" Thomas wrote.

The district attorney appeared puzzled by the stipulation.

"As you know, I have never threatened any of the parents with criminal prosecution nor do I possess sufficient information or evidence to suggest that any criminal prosecution would be considered or would be appropriate," Thomas stated.

He listed questions and concerns he had, including whether:

- Wayne Harris found a pipe bomb made by his son and they detonated it, as one of his son's friends claimed.
- The Harrises were aware of their son's violent rantings on the Internet and in his diary. Eric Harris wrote of his and Klebold's plan to ambush their school.
- The parents had any knowledge, "however slight," of the gunmen's anger toward their classmates. Dozens of students have said Harris was mercilessly tormented at Columbine High.

Wayne and Kathy Harris met briefly with Jefferson County sheriff's detectives after the shootings but provided few details.

The families of some Columbine victims sued the gunmen's parents. Most cases were settled out of court, but some families have refused to settle until the parents talk.

Contact Lynn Bartels at (303) 892-5327 or [bartels@RockyMountainNews.com](mailto:bartels@RockyMountainNews.com).

Staff writer Kevin Vaughan contributed to this report.

**January 14, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

# Jeffco DA seeks Rohrbough inquest

But slain Columbine student's family wants wider probe by legislative panel

By Kieran Nicholson  
Denver Post Staff Writer

**Tuesday, January 15, 2002 - Updated 12:30 p.m.** - The attorney for Brian Rohrbough is asking the Jefferson County coroner to delay a decision on holding an inquest to look into the death of Columbine High School student Daniel Rohrbough.

In a letter to the coroner sent today, attorney Barry Arrington asks that the decision be delayed until after they have pursued other alternatives. Those alternatives include the possibility that the Rohrbough's civil suit could be reinstated or a federal grand jury could be impaneled to look into the allegations that a police officer shot Daniel Rohrbough and not gunmen Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold.

The Jefferson County district attorney took the unusual step Monday of asking the county coroner to hold an inquest into the death of Columbine High School student Daniel Rohrbough.

Coroner Carl Blesch said in a statement that he's taking the request "under advisement" and will announce a decision Thursday.

"As all of the controversy rose and fell and swirled around, it seemed to us that this is the next logical progression," said Pam Russell, spokeswoman for District Attorney Dave Thomas. "Certainly the manner of death has been questioned."

Rohrbough's parents long have pushed for additional investigations into Daniel's death during the April 20, 1999, massacre at Columbine. They propelled the issue to new heights last month when they claimed in a filing in federal court that Denver police Sgt. Dan O'Shea, not Columbine killers Eric Harris or Dylan Klebold, shot their 15-year-old son.

O'Shea has denied the claim, including through his lawyer again on Monday, who said O'Shea is more than willing to testify before a coroner's inquest.

A federal judge in November dismissed eight of nine wrongful-death and negligence suits that victims' families had filed against the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office. Those families, including Rohrbough's, have asked the judge and an appeals court to reinstate them.

The Rohrboughs last week also asked Colorado U.S. Attorney John Suthers to convene a federal grand jury, and Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone has asked the El Paso County sheriff to investigate allegations of police wrongdoing.

Arrington, the Rohrbough family's lawyer, had said he'll ask Blesch to delay an inquest while he pursues a legislative inquiry into Columbine. "We are not against the coroner's inquiry," Arrington said. "We just think other alternatives are superior."

Coroner's inquests are rare in Colorado. The proceeding takes place in an open court setting, during which a six-member jury determines the cause and manner of death. Witnesses are subpoenaed and must appear, but they can invoke their right to remain silent. The witnesses are questioned by both the district attorney and the coroner.

"The reason we think the coroner's Inquest should be delayed is it makes the legislative commission less urgent and less compelling," Arrington said. "While we are in the current legislative session, we don't want that message sent."

Rep. Don Lee, R-Littleton, said today he will introduce a resolution asking the Colorado House of Representatives to approve creation of a legislative committee with subpoena powers to look into the police investigation of the crime. The procedure has been granted in the past to look into organized crime, land purchases and transportation.

Lee said the legislative committee would go beyond the Inquest, which is limited to looking into the cause of death, to examine discrepancies in a police timeline of events that day.

"We're not looking for someone to charge with a criminal act. We just want to get the truth out there so we can move on," Lee said.

Lee said a legislative inquiry could require people to speak who have declined to do so because of litigation.

Lee, who represents the district that includes Columbine, says he also doesn't feel a coroner's Inquest will answer all questions about the manner of Daniel Rohrbough's death.

Arrington said any independent investigation into Columbine should go beyond Daniel Rohrbough's death and look at:

How 10 students who were killed in the school's library died.

How the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office and district attorney's office allegedly dismissed warning signs surrounding Harris and Klebold prior to the shootings.

Whether investigators hid the truth about what happened on April 20, 1999.

The scope of a coroner's Inquest will be "far too limited," Arrington said.

"This is a diversion, this is not an investigation," said Daniel's father, Brian Rohrbough. "We are looking into the death of one of 13 victims, and they are trying to avoid the corruption in the police departments involved."

Rohrbough said investigators lied about physical evidence and the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office blocked the release of information to victims' families.

"We believe that Jefferson County law enforcement's goal is to prevent any effective investigation into their behavior and Thomas' call for a coroner's Inquest is one more way to try to derail our efforts at finding the truth."

Jefferson County sheriff's spokeswoman Jacki Tallman welcomed the call for a coroner's Inquest. "We absolutely support whatever decision is made by the DA's office and coroner's office regarding an Inquest," Tallman said.

The Associated Press, 9News.com and Post staff writers Trent Selbert and Howard Pankratz contributed to this story.

[Printable View](#)

[Email a Copy of this Article](#)

[Return to top](#)

# Police sergeant denies that he shot student

By Jim Kirksey  
Denver Post Staff Writer

**Tuesday, January 15, 2002** - Sgt. Dan O'Shea did not shoot anyone at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999, the Denver policeman's attorney said Monday.

"There are a lot of casualties from Columbine, and Danny O'Shea is one of them," attorney David Bruno said.

O'Shea and his family are suffering in the glare of publicity surrounding assertions that he shot Daniel Rohrbough, one of the 13 Columbine victims, Bruno said. The assertions have been made by Rohrbough's parents in a motion to have a civil suit reinstated.

O'Shea made a statement to investigators the day of the massacre, and he has not been asked to make another one, Bruno said.

The sergeant will gladly cooperate with a coroner's inquest into Rohrbough's death if one is called, or with the investigation being conducted by the El Paso County Sheriff's Department, Bruno said.

The allegations are based on statements by Jefferson County school administrator Celine Marquez that two days after the high school shootings O'Shea broke down crying and said he may have mistakenly shot an innocent student at Columbine, and statements by former Arapahoe County sheriff's Lt. Jim Taylor that he saw Rohrbough get shot and that a Denver police officer was nearby firing his weapon at the time.

Taylor has since recanted those remarks and was fired by Arapahoe County Sheriff Pat Sullivan.

[Printable View](#)

[Email a Copy of this Article](#)

[Return to top](#)

# Coroner: Process helps determine facts of death

By Howard Pankratz  
Denver Post Legal Affairs Writer

**Tuesday, January 15, 2002** - Though rare, the coroner's Inquest is a useful tool that informs the public about a person's death, Pueblo County Coroner Jim Kramer said Monday.

Kramer, the county coroner since 1977, uses the Inquest to determine cause and manner of death more than any other Colorado coroner, about once every 12 to 18 months.

"I use them because in my opinion it is a very valid process that allows for public hearings and allows the family to ask questions," said Kramer, president of the Colorado Coroners Association from 1987 to 1997.

Kramer says he believes Inquests should be considered when the circumstances include homicides, law-enforcement shootings, conflict of interest, law-enforcement requests, workers' compensation, high-profile deaths or when a family requests it.

Kramer said that both the coroner and the district attorney ask questions of the subpoenaed witnesses before a six-member grand-jury-like panel.

The jury, after listening to the testimony, can name the person who caused the death, if that is the reason for the death.

But the district attorney, acting separately, decides if criminal charges should be filed against the person named by the jury.

C.J. Miller, the coroner in Gunnison County for the past 37 years, said that except for Pueblo, the use of coroner's Inquests are "fairly rare."

"The objective is to determine how, when and by what person and whether accidental, felonious or suicide," Miller said. He said he used Inquests right after the person died because he could take statements when they were fresh.

[Printable View](#)

[Email a Copy of this Article](#)

[Return to top](#)

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_941685,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_941685,00.html)

### Legislator wants committee to investigate Columbine

By Steven K. Paulson, Associated Press

State Rep. Don Lee, whose son was in Columbine High School's cafeteria when two student gunmen began their rampage, said today he wants a legislative committee with subpoena powers to look into the police investigation of the crime.

Lee, R-Littleton, said he will introduce a resolution asking the Colorado House of Representatives to approve the procedure, which has been granted in the past to look into organized crime, land purchases and transportation.

On Monday, prosecutors requested a coroner's inquest into the death of a Columbine student whose parents claim he was accidentally killed by a police officer during the 1999 massacre.

Daniel Rohrbough's parents say he was shot by a Denver SWAT team member who rushed to the school after teen gunmen Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold began their April 20, 1999, assault at the high school. The sheriff's report on the shooting says Rohrbough was shot by Klebold.

Coroner Carl Blesch said he hoped to decide on the inquest request by Thursday.

Barry Arrington, a lawyer for parents including the Rohrboughs trying to reinstate federal lawsuits over the shootings, asked the coroner to delay his inquest until a decision is made on a federal grand jury or legislative inquiry.

Arrington said he is not asking for new laws. He said he wants lawmakers to look at the full scope of allegations that police mishandled their investigation into what happened at Columbine and tried to cover it up.

"There is no doubt they are not capable of making a candid assessment. They flat out lied," Arrington said.

Lee said the legislative committee would go beyond the inquest, which is limited to looking into the cause of death, to examine discrepancies in a police timeline of events that day.

"We're not looking for someone to charge with a criminal act. We just want to get the truth out there so we can move on," Lee said.

Lee said a legislative inquiry could require people to speak who have declined to do so because of litigation.

Among those Arrington and Lee would like subpoenaed is Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone, who has refused to testify before the Columbine Commission formed by Gov. Bill Owens, which lacked subpoena powers.

In a report released last May, the commission concluded that authorities failed to recognize and act on numerous advance signs that the two student gunmen were planning the deadly attack. Commissioners said Stone's refusal to testify blocked further investigation.

Arrington said he also hopes the committee can subpoena police officers who were at Columbine and have refused to talk about the investigation for fear of their jobs.

Jacki Tallman, spokeswoman for the Jefferson County sheriff's office, did not return calls seeking comment.

**January 15, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_941160,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_941160,00.html)

### Columbine tale began with photo

'When he looked at it, his face went ashen,' slain boy's mom says about former deputy

By Kevin Vaughan, News Staff Writer

A tale that cost a deputy sheriff his job and catapulted the Columbine tragedy back into the limelight began with a running boy and a startling newspaper photograph.

Fifteen-year-old Daniel Rohrbough was among the Columbine High students who never came home from school April 20, 1999.

His parents, Sue Petrone and Brian Rohrbough, feared the worst.

The next morning, Daniel's stepfather, Rich Petrone, opened the *Rocky Mountain News*. On Page 13, the family's nightmare was confirmed. A photograph, taken from a helicopter, showed a student prone on the sidewalk, motionless, while other teen-agers and a police officer crouched behind a car nearby.

The dead boy was Daniel.

The photograph set in motion a chain of events that led his family to believe that a police officer, not gunmen Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, shot their son.

Sue and Rich Petrone and other family members rushed to Columbine, newspaper in hand, hoping to get to Daniel. They begged investigators to remove his body from the sidewalk where he'd lain all afternoon that Tuesday and through the night.

Investigators turned them away, sending them to nearby Leawood Elementary School, where counselors were trying to help the shattered families deal with the deadliest school shooting in U.S. history.

At Leawood one of Sue Petrone's oldest friends, Pam Taylor, comforted her. Petrone showed her the newspaper.

Taylor told her friend that her husband, Arapahoe County sheriff's Deputy Jim Taylor, had been at Columbine and had told her he'd seen a boy get shot.

Pam Taylor called her husband and asked him to come to the school, Petrone said.

"He came in and he gave me a hug, and then Pam said, 'Show Jim the picture,' " Petrone recounted Friday.

She opened the newspaper.

"When he looked at it, his face went ashen," Petrone said.

Taylor walked from the school. Petrone said she believes he needed to compose himself.

A short time later, Jim Taylor returned and, according to Petrone, told her a story about seeing a boy get shot on the sidewalk while running from the school.

Later, she said, Jim Taylor repeated the story to Daniel's father.

Rohrbough said he was particularly interested in one question: Did his son suffer?

"That's when Jim said, 'No, he was dead before he hit the ground,' " Rohrbough said. "Jim was highly distraught. Here you are a cop on the scene and you see a kid get killed and you can't do anything about it.

"It's certainly not the kind of story you would make up if you were trying to comfort someone."

In the coming months, Rohrbough said he talked to Taylor often. Columbine always came up.

In March 2000, Sue and Rich Petrone invited the deputy and his family over. The family was preparing a lawsuit over the tragedy and they wanted to verify, again, Taylor's version of events.

Sue Petrone surreptitiously tape-recorded the conversation. "We were prepared for him to say, 'You know, that was the most traumatic day of my life. I'm not really sure what I saw,' " Rohrbough said.

Instead, Rohrbough said, the story matched in almost every way with the initial conversations he'd had with the deputy the day after the tragedy.

"We gave him every opportunity: 'Are you sure it was Dan? Are you sure this was what you saw?' " Rohrbough said.

It was, Taylor said, according to excerpts of the tape.

"What I seen was a boy coming down the sidewalk, you know, kind of running, you know, a fast trot," Taylor said, according to the tape. "They were just running in mass chaos, and I seen a boy drop. . . ."

At that point, Rich Petrone asked, "You think it was Dan, though, or you don't know?"

"It was Dan," Taylor answered, "and I didn't know that until I seen the photo the next morning in the newspaper that it was the boy that I seen."

Last December, after a federal judge dismissed all but three of the lawsuits filed against Jefferson County authorities, the families of Rohrbough and four other victims began preparing a motion for reconsideration.

At that point, Sue Petrone said, she called Taylor and told him that the family was getting ready to file papers in federal court based, in part, on what he had told them.

"That," Brian Rohrbough said, "was also another opportunity for Jim Taylor to come to us and say, 'Don't do that, we need to sit down and talk about it.' "

The day after Christmas, the five families filed their motion.

Taylor was out of state, visiting his sick mother.

On Dec. 31, after returning to Colorado, Taylor gave his supervisors a written statement.

He claimed that he was never in a position to see Daniel Rohrbough killed. He said that he told the family only about things he had seen on television or in a newspaper.

Arapahoe County Sheriff Pat Sullivan investigated the contradiction. In firing the deputy, the sheriff concluded Taylor had lied to the family but gave a "solid" statement to investigators.

Taylor has not commented publicly on the situation.

The family believes Taylor's original story is the truth.

"His (Dec. 31) statement said that he never said anything to the family that would lead them to believe he'd seen it," Brian Rohrbough said. "The tape proves that is a lie."

*Contact Kevin Vaughan at (303) 892-5019 or [vaughank@RockyMountainNews.com](mailto:vaughank@RockyMountainNews.com).*

**January 15, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

**sections**  
metro | obits  
business  
life | go!  
sports | weather

**online features**  
ap wire | msnbc  
cinema guide  
gazette services  
quick facts

**market place**  
classified  
careers | coupons  
real estate | auto  
print ads online

**Subscribe Today!**



January 16, 2002

## Columbine subpoenas sought by lawmaker

The Associated Press

DENVER - State Rep. Don Lee, whose son was in Columbine High School's cafeteria when two student gunmen began their rampage, said Tuesday he wants a legislative committee with subpoena powers to look into the police investigation of the crime.

Lee, R-Littleton, said he will introduce a resolution asking the Colorado House of Representatives to approve the procedure, which has been granted in the past to look into organized crime, land purchases and transportation.

On Monday, prosecutors requested a coroner's inquest into the death of a Columbine student whose parents say he was accidentally killed by a police officer during the 1999 massacre.

Daniel Rohrbough's parents say he was shot by a Denver SWAT team member who rushed to the school after teen gunmen Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold began their April 20, 1999, assault at the high school. The sheriff's report on the shooting says Rohrbough was shot by Klebold.

Coroner Carl Blesch said he hoped to decide on the request by Thursday. A lawyer for parents trying to reinstate lawsuits over the shootings asked the coroner to delay his decision until a ruling is made by a federal jury.

On

CLIP



BRECKEN



## Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_942402,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_942402,00.html)

### Stone talks on Columbine

Sheriff from Jeffco often gives speeches on school shootings

By Jeff Kass, News Staff Writer

Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone, who refused to speak to a governor's panel about Columbine, is set to tell what he knows about the tragedy to California juvenile officers.

Stone's talk, scheduled for Jan. 31 near San Diego, is titled, "Columbine: Then and Now."

It is one of many speeches the sheriff has given nationwide since the April 20, 1999, shootings at Columbine High School that left 15 dead.

Sheriff's spokeswoman Jacki Tallman said the speeches are more akin to "tactical training talks" that discuss law enforcement maneuvers. That, she said, differs from the broad range of questions Stone would have faced from the commission.

"The reason we did these trainings is to teach other law enforcement professionals" how to better respond and the lessons learned from Columbine, Tallman said.

She also said the closed-door nature of law-enforcement talks might give Stone some legal protection. The sheriff's office has been sued by several victims' families.

Several have filed lawsuits accusing the department of failing to catch the warning signs before the shooting, and botching the response. They also have accused Stone of withholding and covering up key information, charges Stone denies.

Many are critical of decisions Stone has made since the shootings, including KOA talk show host Dan Caplis.

"Stone has lost all sense of professional honor and duty," said Caplis, who is also an attorney.

"His first duty is to the children who were slaughtered on his watch, and to the governor who wants the truth about how it happened," he said.

"It was not California blood spilled at Columbine."

Bill Tuthill, acting Jefferson County attorney, said the sheriff is sharing what he has learned.

"The sheriff has never said there weren't lessons to be learned, or that haven't been learned," Tuthill said.

Former Colorado Supreme Court Chief Justice William Erickson, who headed the governor's commission convened to investigate Columbine, publicly tussled with Stone over his no-show.

But he said he had no comment on Stone's scheduled appearance in California.

"I don't think my opinion on that would be of any value. He is of course at liberty to talk to anyone he

wants to," Erickson said.

The seminar is sponsored by the Southern California Juvenile Officers Association. Association Vice President William Baxter, a Los Angeles juvenile narcotics officer, said Stone could provide attendees with details that could help them in their jobs.

"Any of these huge events don't go down like *Columbo*, like they do on television," Baxter said. "There's always a huge cluster."

Baxter said he was aware of some of the controversy surrounding Stone.

Baxter said he did not expect Stone to discuss the specifics of Columbine or its aftermath but generalities that can help other juvenile justice workers.

Tallman, the sheriff's spokeswoman, did not have the exact number of times Stone, and others in the department, have spoken about Columbine. She said talks are typically done on an employee's own time.

She said the sheriff, for example, might take vacation or leave without pay.

Stone's expenses, such as airfare and hotel, are paid by conference sponsors. He will not be paid anything beyond expenses by the California group, she said.

Tallman said the sheriff has not received gifts in exchange for his talks.

She only knew of one instance where he was paid a speaking fee. Tallman and county spokesman John Masson could not confirm the event or amount. But they said Stone donated the money to a college fund for the children of a sheriff's office worker diagnosed with terminal cancer.

Contact Jeff Kass at (303) 892-2406 or [kassj@RockyMountainNews.com](mailto:kassj@RockyMountainNews.com).

**January 16, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

## Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/opinion/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_38\\_941967,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/opinion/article/0,1299,DRMN_38_941967,00.html)

### Editorial: The need for an inquest

**The Issue:** The Jefferson County coroner has said he'll soon announce whether to call an Inquest into the death of Daniel Rohrbough, as the Jeffco district attorney has requested. We hope he calls one, even though we can understand why Daniel's parents and their attorney would prefer the coroner wait a few more weeks before deciding whether to move forward.

**Our view:** We not only understand; we *support* their push for a wider investigation with full subpoena powers into law enforcement's conduct at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999. We're just not as confident as they are that it's going to happen, and you know what they say about a bird in the hand.

**Legislature needs to act, too**

In a letter sent Tuesday to coroner Carl Blesch, attorney Barry Arrington explained that Brian Rohrbough and Sue Petrone still "hope and believe that their civil lawsuit against the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department will be reinstated based upon new evidence that has recently come to light. In addition, United States Attorney John Suthers is currently considering their request to launch a federal grand jury investigation into the events that occurred at Columbine . . . Finally, we are also talking to members of the General Assembly who have expressed a great deal of interest in establishing a legislative commission to investigate these matters."

Let's take those possibilities in order:

**Reinstating the lawsuit.** This is a long shot, at least based upon our reading of Judge Lewis T. Babcock's rulings of late November. Granted that some new evidence has come to light since then, most notably a disturbing tape recording of Arapahoe County deputy Jim Taylor made 11 months after the shootings, but Babcock made it clear that a public employee is not liable for negligence unless he knows that it is "highly probable" his decision will result in tragedy. Even if a police officer *did* shoot Daniel Rohrbough, it's hard to see how the officer should have known such an outcome was likely.

**A federal grand jury.** This is even more unlikely, we suspect. We just can't see Suthers grabbing a hot potato like Columbine and possibly mirroring himself for months in a probe that won't result even in a public report if criminal wrongdoing is not discovered. And first Suthers would have to decide that there is evidence of a federal crime. Finally, keep in mind that Suthers was a cabinet member in Gov. Bill Owens' administration, whose blue-ribbon commission was supposed to have done a thorough probe already into Columbine.

**A legislative committee.** Not only is this our favorite among the three options, it's apparently the one with the best chance of seeing the light of day. Republican Rep. Don Lee of Littleton is proposing to convene such a committee with subpoena powers to investigate the full range of issues involving police behavior and Columbine. Frankly, such a committee should have been put in place a long time ago -- especially once it became clear that the governor's commission was going to be such a toothless creature.

So why not forgo a coroner's inquest and just wait for the legislature to ride to the rescue? After all, who killed Daniel Rohrbough is hardly the only question, or even the most significant one, involving Columbine. Figuring out why police took so long to get to the library and to rescue Dave Sanders looms at least as large.

Yet there are at least three reasons for Blesch to proceed rather than wait. First, who knows whether the legislature will buy Lee's idea? He tells us he thinks he can get majority support, but that remains to be seen.

Second, who knows whether the committee will function as advertised, let alone how long it will take to reach any conclusions? Will it take six months? Eighteen?

Finally, if the sheriff's department *did* cover up the truth about who killed Daniel Rohrbough, and the inquest says so, it *will* be time for a state or federal grand jury. Nearly three years after Columbine, there is simply no more time to lose in getting to the truth.

**January 16, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

## Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_942357,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_942357,00.html)

### Legislative Columbine probe?

State representative to push for panel unless tragedy is investigated by a federal grand jury

By Kevin Vaughn and Michele Ames, News Staff Writers

A state lawmaker said Tuesday that if a federal grand jury doesn't investigate the Columbine High School tragedy he will push to create a legislative panel to do it.

Rep. Don Lee, R-Littleton, said he would propose an investigative panel with subpoena power. Legislators in both parties and families of at least two Columbine victims voiced support for the proposal.

"I am not looking for legal action," Lee said. "I am not looking for someone to blame. I'm just looking for what we can learn from this."

The legislative panel is one of several options for looking into the Columbine tragedy, which has spawned fresh controversy with new allegations that a Denver police officer mistakenly shot and killed a student and charges that officials have covered it up.

U.S. Attorney John Suthers is considering a request to take the case to a federal grand jury. As of Tuesday afternoon, he had announced no decision.

At the same time, Jefferson County District Attorney Dave Thomas on Monday formally asked to convene a coroner's inquest to look into the death of Daniel Rohrbough, a 15-year-old student shot in the April 20, 1999, attacks.

Coroner Carl Blesch is expected to decide by Thursday. However, the attorney for Rohrbough's family on Tuesday morning formally asked Blesch to delay his decision until he could pursue the family's civil lawsuit, and the possibility of either a federal grand jury or a legislative investigation.

Lee, whose son, Shaun, was in the school cafeteria on April 20, 1999, when Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold began their attack, said he was considering a proposal to create a committee of either state representatives or representatives and senators that would have the power to subpoena witnesses and documents.

Lee said the committee's aim would be a "fact finding" mission to "finally put to rest this tragedy."

In order to pass the resolution and form the committee, Lee would have to get a majority of his 65 House colleagues to approve the plan. If senators were to also be on the committee, he would have to get the agreement of a majority of 35 in that chamber.

Several lawmakers said they would support the proposal.

House Speaker Doug Dean, R-Colorado Springs, said he would lend the substantial power of his office to advancing Lee's plan should other investigative measures not be pursued. Lee represents the Columbine area.

"I think those in the legislature ought to listen to Don when he says his constituents want some answers," Dean said. "People want answers, and I think they have a right to them."

Lee is also likely to receive support from his Democratic colleagues in the House if he moves forward with his plan, according to House Minority Leader Dan Grossman, D-Denver.

"I'm generally supportive of any efforts to get more information to the families who were so tragically affected," Grossman said. "I'm not sure that the legislature is the best forum for it, but if it can get more information to the families I suspect I and my caucus would support it."

Gov. Bill Owens said he hadn't studied the proposal and wanted to discuss it with legislative leadership before he took a position. Owens appointed his own commission headed by former Colorado Supreme Court Chief Justice William Erickson.

That commission disbanded on Dec. 31 after making a final report. The group lacked subpoena power and couldn't require some of the key players in the event to testify.

The panel Lee is proposing would have subpoena power to compel people such as Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone, who refused to appear before the governor's commission, to testify.

Barry Arrington, the attorney for Rohrbough's family, said his first choice would be to have the civil lawsuits reinstated in federal court.

Short of that, he believes the legislative commission is best.

Rohrbough's father, Brian Rohrbough, agrees. He would support a legislative investigation into the Columbine tragedy because it would offer many of the benefits of a grand jury proceeding but also would likely conclude with a public report.

"At the end of it you would have their findings," he said Tuesday.

Rohrbough said he worried that politics could be a factor in the investigation and doesn't want that to happen. What he does want to happen is an investigation into Columbine "so that we can learn what happened, why it happened, and what can be learned to keep it from happening again."

Rohrbough has maintained since April 2000 that a law officer's bullet -- not one from Columbine killers Harris and Klebold -- took his son's life.

After lawsuits filed by the Rohrboughs and the families of four other Columbine victims were dismissed in November, they filed a motion to revive the suits that contained new allegations and, for the first time, named the officer they believe fired the fatal shot.

*Contact Kevin Vaughan at (303) 892-5019 or [vaughank@RockyMountainNews.com](mailto:vaughank@RockyMountainNews.com). News staff writer Karen Abbott contributed to this story.*

**January 16, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

WAR ON TERROR  
ABOUT US/HELP  
ARCHIVES  
BOOKS  
BUSINESS  
CLASSIFIEDS  
COLUMNISTS  
COMMUNITY  
CONTACT US  
DISCUSSION  
DPO BY E-MAIL  
DPO WIRELESS  
ENTERTAINMENT  
FOOD/DINING  
LIFESTYLES  
NEWS  
- Breaking News  
- Census  
- Columbine  
- Columnists  
- CSAP Tests  
- School Grades  
- Jon Benet  
- Legislature  
- Lottery  
- Police Force  
- Politics  
- Ranger  
- Stadium  
- Smog Report  
- Toxic Gas  
- T-REX  
- World/Nation  
OBITUARIES  
OPINION  
SEAS. TO SHARE  
SHOPPING  
SPORTS  
STOCK SHOW  
TRAVEL  
WEATHER  
DPO HOME

**SEARCH DPO:**

Enter search term,  
hit enter key  
Click here for  
advanced search

## Weapon provider eligible for parole

Early release wrong, Columbine dad says

By John Ingold  
Denver Post Staff Writer

**Wednesday, January 16, 2002** - Mark Manes, convicted and sentenced to prison for selling the Columbine killers their semi-automatic handgun, gets his first chance at parole today.

Manes, 24, is in his third year of a six-year sentence for providing Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold with the TEC-DC9 they used in the Manes April 20, 1999, rampage that left 15 people dead and two dozen wounded.

Manes has spent the past six months in a halfway house in Lakewood. Today is his first parole hearing since being sentenced in November 1999.

Manes' possible early release has upset some Columbine victims' families.

"I recognize the system wants some ability to award good behavior," said Tom Mauser, whose son, Daniel, was killed at Columbine. "But this is so much more than that. It seems like no time has passed."

Attorney Robert Ransome said it is time for his client to be released.

"I just hope (the parole board) does the right thing, which is give him parole," Ransome said. "He never should have gone to prison."

About 2 percent of people eligible for parole for the first time receive it.

Ransome said his client deserves the chance to move on. Manes has resumed his computer job, he said.

But Mauser said an early release would minimize the consequences of what Manes did. Klebold fired the TEC-DC9, which cost the killers \$500, 55 times, killing four people and wounding two.

Mauser said he also is upset that no authorities told him

**Today's Stories**

**Jan. 16:**

- Coroner's inquest seen as top option

- Jeffco coroner a former officer, DA investigator

- Family seeks delay in inquest decision

Manes was coming up for parole.

"We're all working people," Mauser said of the victims' families. "We have to know in advance to plan to be there and make our voices heard."

Neither the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office nor district attorney's office were notified of the parole hearing by the state Department of Corrections, spokeswoman with the agencies said.

A Department of Corrections spokeswoman said her department is not required to notify victims or their relatives of parole hearings but will do so upon a request.

[Printable View](#)

[Email a Copy of this Article](#)

[Return to top](#)

All contents Copyright 2001 The Denver Post or other copyright holders. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed for any commercial purpose. [Terms of use](#) | [Privacy policy](#)

[Go to Section](#)

[DPO A to Z](#)

WAR ON TERROR  
ABOUT US/HELP  
ARCHIVES  
BOOKS  
BUSINESS  
CLASSIFIEDS  
COLUMNISTS  
COMMUNITY  
CONTACT US  
DISCUSSION  
DPO BY E-MAIL  
DPO WIRELESS  
ENTERTAINMENT  
FOOD/DINING  
LIFESTYLES  
NEWS  
- Breaking News  
- Census  
- Columbine  
- Columnists  
- CSAP Tests  
- School Grades  
- JonBenet  
- Legislature  
- Lottery  
- Police Force  
- Politics  
- Ranger  
- Stadium  
- Smog Report  
- Toxic Gas  
- T-REX  
- World/Nation  
OBITUARIES  
OPINION  
SEAS. TO SHARE  
SHOPPING  
SPORTS  
STOCK SHOW  
TRAVEL  
WEATHER  
DPO HOME

**SEARCH DPO:**

Enter search term,  
hit enter key  
Click here for  
advanced search

## Coroner's inquest seen as top option

By Howard Pankratz  
Denver Post Legal Affairs Writer

**Wednesday, January 16, 2002** - Legal experts say a coroner's inquest into the death of Columbine student Daniel Rohrbough would be better than any other alternative being considered, such as a grand jury.

With a federal, state or county grand jury, the Rohrbough family and the public might be left with no answers - similar to what happened when the JonBenet Ramsey murder case went to a grand jury in Boulder, lawyers and other experts said Tuesday.

"It's kind of like the Ramsey grand jury, where at the end of it you get an announcement, 'The grand jury has no indictment. Goodbye.' Those were not solutions," Denver attorney Larry Pozner said. "The coroner's inquest is a very good solution in this case because a grand jury is going to end up being secret. I think (Jefferson County District Attorney) David Thomas is sincere that he does not want this to be a tale of a thousand suspicions."

Thomas on Monday requested that Jefferson County Coroner Carl Blesch conduct the inquest into Daniel's death. Blesch will announce Thursday whether he will.

Pozner said he believes the scope of the coroner's inquest should be expanded to include looking at all 13 victims' deaths.

"As long as we are going to do something, subpoena everyone," Pozner said. "I think Colorado and America want to know why didn't the cops go into the building. Who ordered it? Who said, 'Do not go in there?' I think we should find the truth about Columbine once and for all."

But Pam Russell, spokeswoman for Thomas, said Blesch has yet to decide if he will even convene the inquest. If it does convene, it would be Blesch's decision whether to widen the scope, Russell said.

An inquest is a grand-jury-like proceeding to determine the cause and manner of death. Unlike true grand-jury

**Today's Stories**

**Jan. 16:**

-Jeffco coroner a former officer, DA investigator

-Family seeks delay in inquest decision

-Weapon provider eligible for parole

hearings, though, an inquest is open to the public.

Daniel was shot three times. But his parents claim in federal court papers that Denver police Sgt. Dan O'Shea fired at least one of those shots, not Columbine killers Eric Harris or Dylan Klebold.

The official report on the April 20, 1999, massacre, prepared by the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, lists Klebold as Daniel's killer, and O'Shea has denied the friendly-fire accusation.

Denver lawyer Nathan Chambers agrees with Pozner about the drawbacks to grand juries.

"The problem with grand juries is their secrecy, particularly in a situation like this where there is great public concern about what happened," Chambers said. "I'm not sure a grand jury is going to really solve the crucial problem, which is public confidence."

Under state law, a six-member jury would hear evidence presented during an inquest, which are rarely used in Colorado.

The coroner runs the inquest, but the district attorney acts as legal adviser and may bring criminal charges after the inquest. Witnesses are subpoenaed but can invoke their constitutional right to remain silent.

The jury determines time and location of death, and the cause and manner in which the person died - by accident, homicide, suicide or natural causes. If the person who caused the death can be identified, the jury names that person.

Daniel's parents, Brian Rohrbough and Sue Patrone, say the inquest proposed here is too narrow in scope - it would only examine their son's death and not those of the 12 other victims. Nor would it probe allegations of a coverup by the sheriff's office and other agencies.

They prefer a legislative commission or a grand jury.

They would also like to see the reinstatement of their wrongful-death and negligence lawsuit against the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office. A federal judge dismissed the suit, and several others by victims' families, in November.

But lawyer Scott Robinson said what Daniel's parents want may be unattainable.

"Obviously the victims' parents want far more than the

coroner's Inquest. They won't be satisfied until somebody is on the receiving end of a criminal charge," Robinson said. "But under the circumstances, it is pretty unlikely.

"And ultimately, the coroner's Inquest may be the best available alternative that winds up being feasible," Robinson said. "If the parents as a whole are sincere that what they are after are answers, then I think a coroner's Inquest will go part way."

Chambers said the Rohrbough family's lawyer, Barry Arrington, would also like a state legislative commission to look into Columbine.

The problem, Chambers said, is that in the plan outlined by Arrington, no public hearings would be held by the commission. Rather, depositions would be taken in secret and a report issued later.

"If the purpose of this is to try to instill public confidence that the truth is being told about what happened," Chambers said, "then the more the process is open to public scrutiny the better."

Denver lawyer David Lane believes a grand jury may be the way to go. Grand juries can issue reports even if they don't indict, and Inquests are limited to determining the cause and manner of death, he said.

[Printable View](#)

[Email a Copy of this Article](#)

[Return to top](#)

All contents Copyright 2001 The Denver Post or other copyright holders. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed for any commercial purpose.  
[Terms of use](#) | [Privacy policy](#)

[Go to Section](#)

DPO A to Z



WAR ON TERROR  
ABOUT US/HELP  
ARCHIVES  
BOOKS  
BUSINESS  
CLASSIFIEDS  
COLUMNISTS  
COMMUNITY  
CONTACT US  
DISCUSSION  
DPO BY E-MAIL  
DPO WIRELESS  
ENTERTAINMENT  
FOOD/DINING  
LIFESTYLES  
NEWS  
- Breaking News  
- Census  
- Columbine  
- Columnists  
- CSAP Tests  
- School Grades  
- JonBenet  
- Legislature  
- Lottery  
- Police Force  
- Politics  
- Ranger  
- Stadium  
- Smog Report  
- Toxic Gas  
- T-REX  
- World/Nation  
OBITUARIES  
OPINION  
SEAS. TO SHARE  
SHOPPING  
SPORTS  
STOCK SHOW  
TRAVEL  
WEATHER  
DPO HOME

**SEARCH DPO:**

Enter search term,  
hit enter key  
Click here for  
advanced search

## Jeffco coroner a former officer, DA investigator

By Kieran Nicholson  
Denver Post Staff Writer

**Wednesday, January 16, 2002** - The coroner who will decide whether to pursue an inquest into Columbine student Daniel Rohrbough's death is a one-time law officer with an ongoing passion for forensic medicine.



Post / Helen DeWitt

Carl A. Blesch, 52, a first-time coroner who has held the Jefferson County post for just under a year, was thrust into the center of controversy this week when District Attorney Dave Thomas requested the inquest.

Blesch, a licensed physician assistant, earned a master's degree in medical science from St. Francis College in Loretto, Pa., in 2000.

He became immersed in forensics while rising through the ranks and becoming a captain for the Adams County Sheriff's Office and then as an investigator with the district attorney offices in Adams and Jefferson counties.

"He was smarter than the average guy, well-educated and well-spoken," said Adams County sheriff's Capt. Fred Stoll.

Stoll trained Blesch as a patrol deputy back in the 1970s.

"I was always impressed with Carl's intelligence," Stoll said. "He has a lot of courage. I'm sure Carl will do the right thing."

Renle DePonte, a dean at Red Rocks, has known Blesch for about four years. She describes Blesch as "calm and collected."

"If anyone has to be thrust into the limelight, it's a good thing it's him," DePonte said. "He will be able to handle it in a fair and honest manner and take all the facts into consideration."

**Today's Stories**

**Jan. 16:**

-Coroner's inquest seen as top option

-Family seeks delay in inquest decision

-Weapon provider eligible for parole

In 1970, Blesch graduated from Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio, with a degree in political science and psychology. He then attended Duke University to study law and transferred to the University of Denver in 1972.

After interning in Denver's juvenile court and a prisoners' assistance program, Blesch left law school and joined the sheriff's office in Adams County.

Blesch left the Sheriff's Office and went to work as an investigator with the district attorney in Adams County where he cultivated an interest in forensics.

"That's when I decided to go to Pennsylvania and become a physician assistant," Blesch said. "I wanted to learn more about medicine to do a better job with forensics."

In 1983, Blesch graduated from Kettering College in Ohio with an associate of science degree in physician assistant studies.

He returned to Adams County and moved on to the Jefferson County district attorney's office in 1987.

As a chief investigator in Jefferson County, Blesch did forensic work in cases involving child abuse, elderly abuse, vehicular assault and vehicular homicide.

In 1994, he went into private practice as a physician assistant. He returned to school and received his master's from St. Francis two years ago.

Blesch, who also supervised the physician assistant program at Red Rocks Community College in 1998 and 1999, was appointed coroner last February, replacing Nancy Bodelson, who left the \$53,000-a-year job to spend more time with her family.

"I'm grateful to have the opportunity for public service, doing something I have always loved," Blesch said.

In Colorado, coroners do not have to be medical doctors. Blesch comes up for re-election to the four-year post in November.

Denver Post staff writer Marilyn Robinson contributed to this report.

**[Printable View](#)**

[Email a Copy of this Article](#)

[Return to top](#)

All contents Copyright 2001 The Denver Post or other copyright holders. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed for any commercial purpose. [Terms of use](#) | [Privacy policy](#)

[Go to Section](#)

DPO A to Z

WAR ON TERROR  
ABOUT US/HELP  
ARCHIVES  
BOOKS  
BUSINESS  
CLASSIFIEDS  
COLUMNISTS  
COMMUNITY  
CONTACT US  
DISCUSSION  
DPO BY E-MAIL  
DPO WIRELESS  
ENTERTAINMENT  
FOOD/DINING  
LIFESTYLES  
NEWS  
- Breaking News  
- Census  
- Columbine  
- Columnists  
- CSAP Tests  
- School Grades  
- JonBenet  
- Legislature  
- Lottery  
- Police Force  
- Politics  
- Ranger  
- Stadium  
- Smog Report  
- Toxic Gas  
- T-REX  
- World/Nation  
OBITUARIES  
OPINION  
SEAS. TO SHARE  
SHOPPING  
SPORTS  
STOCK SHOW  
TRAVEL  
WEATHER  
DPO HOME

**SEARCH DPO:**

Enter search term,  
hit enter key  
Click here for  
advanced search

## Family seeks delay in inquest decision

Coroner Is asked to wait until other  
avenues explored

By Howard Pankratz and Kieran Nicholson  
Denver Post Staff Writers

**Wednesday, January 16, 2002** - The parents of slain Columbine student Daniel Rohrbough asked the Jefferson County coroner Tuesday to indefinitely postpone a decision on whether to conduct an Inquest into their son's death.

In a letter to Coroner Carl Blesch, Brian Rohrbough and Sue Petrone asked Blesch to hold off until a federal judge, the U.S. attorney for Colorado and state lawmakers make their own decisions regarding Columbine.

"By no means do they rule out requesting a coroner's Inquest at a later date," their attorney, Barry Arrington, said in the letter. "At this time, however, they request you to delay your decision until after they have pursued the other alternatives."

Jefferson County District Attorney Dave Thomas asked Blesch on Monday to hold the Inquest. Blesch will announce his decision Thursday.

The Rohrbough family alleges that Daniel was killed by a Denver police officer, not Eric Harris or Dylan Klebold as authorities have said from the outset. The Inquest would aim to clarify the discrepancy.

Blesch said Tuesday that he hadn't made up his mind. His decision will involve a "balancing test" that weighs a number of factors, including where the U.S. attorney and the El Paso County sheriff stand.

"The opinion of the (Rohrbough) family and their lawyer also is of importance to me," Blesch said.

U.S. Attorney John Suthers is considering a request from the family to convene a federal grand jury that would explore how Daniel died and whether authorities covered up a police shooting.

COLUMBINE0118

Should the Columbine  
report be made public?

- ☐ Yes, the truth  
must be revealed
- ☐ Maybe some of it
- ☐ No, this has taken  
up too much time  
and money  
already
- ☐ No opinion

[View Results](#)

**History & Archives**

**Jan. 16:**

-Coroner's  
Inquest seen as  
top option

-Jeffco coroner  
a former  
officer, DA  
Investigator

-Weapon  
provider eligible  
for parole

El Paso County Sheriff John Anderson is conducting an investigation into who killed Rohrbough at the request of Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone.

The family also is pushing for a state legislative commission to investigate.

Blesch said he needs to answer whether the benefits of a public but "limited-scope" inquest outweigh a grand jury or legislative commission, which can probe more broadly but in a closed setting.

Blesch also said he doesn't want to impede any other investigation or process currently underway.

"I'm not attached to the district attorney or law enforcement community. This is an independent agency," Blesch said. "And as such we have the obligation to (Rohrbough) and to the community in determining what happened to cause the death."

Blesch said an inquest would focus on the manner in which Daniel died, specifically if it was an accident or a homicide.

He said an inquest would not start for at least 60 to 90 days. In the interim, he would meet with family members and lawyers for all sides.

Although these meetings would be closed, Blesch said he'd make transcripts of the meetings public.

"One of the questions I would ask folks is, 'Who do you think should come to the inquest to testify and why?'"

Arrington said Daniel's parents have not ruled out a coroner's inquest, but they feel this one would be too narrow in scope, not touching the critical issues about the overall law enforcement response to the school.

Arrington said the scope of the inquest would be limited to Daniel and the three or four minutes before and after when he got shot.

"We don't want it limited to Danny," Arrington said. "We want to talk about what happened to those kids in the library."

Arrington said the best thing would be for U.S. District Judge Lewis Babcock to reinstate the family's wrongful-death and negligence lawsuit against the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office.

Babcock in November dismissed eight lawsuits brought by victims' families.

"I hope Babcock will do it. It stinks to high heaven, and I think maybe the federal judge is getting a whiff of it now," Arrington said.

But Arrington, a former state lawmaker, also said he hopes a state legislative commission investigates.

He said the commission would be composed of about seven state legislators who would hire a staff of lawyers, a paralegal and secretaries.

The staff, which would have subpoena powers, would depose witnesses, study documents and draft a report for the commission, which would make the report public.

There would be no public hearings, and the depositions would be conducted in private.

[Printable View](#)

[Email a Copy of this Article](#)

[Return to top](#)

All contents Copyright 2001 The Denver Post or other copyright holders. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed for any commercial purpose. [Terms of use](#) | [Privacy policy](#)

[Go to Section](#)

DPO A to Z



# Owens, Salazar back Rohrbough inquest

By Howard Pankratz and Kieran Nicholson  
Denver Post Staff Writers

**Thursday, January 17, 2002** - The governor and attorney general voiced strong support Wednesday for an inquest into a Columbine student's death, with the Jefferson County coroner scheduled to announce today whether to launch the inquiry.

"We are beyond the stage of needing to keep information confidential for a criminal investigation. So the information should be made public," Attorney General Ken Salazar said. "A coroner's inquest furthers that interest."

The Jefferson County district attorney asked Coroner Carl Blesch on Monday to convene an inquest into Daniel Rohrbough's death after weeks of scorching controversy over who shot the 15-year-old.

But the family wants Blesch to delay an inquest until broader investigative options are exhausted. The coroner gave no hint Wednesday of which way he was leaning. He said he would announce the decision at a 2 p.m. news conference.

"I really want to take the full amount of time to consider something of this importance," he said.

Over the past few weeks, Blesch has consulted with other metro-area coroners about an inquest, a grand-jury-like proceeding that is open to the public but rarely used in Colorado.

Arapahoe County Coroner Mike Dobersen, who heads the Colorado Coroners Association, said that if he were Blesch he wouldn't hold an inquest.

"My opinion would be they shouldn't," said Dobersen, who conducted four of the 15 Columbine autopsies, though not Rohrbough's. "It wouldn't add significantly to the cause or manner of death, which is the reason for an inquest."

The cause of death is already known: three gunshot wounds. Dobersen said he doubts the inquest will shed any new light on the manner of death or on who shot Rohrbough.

The Rohrbough family alleged in federal court papers last month that a Denver SWAT officer's bullet struck Daniel on April 20, 1999. The official Jefferson County Sheriff's Office report says Dylan Klebold killed the freshman.

The Rohrbough family asked Blesch on Tuesday to delay the inquest while it pursues three other options that would explore broader issues of how all the Columbine victims died, the overall police response to Columbine and whether there was a cover-up over who shot Daniel.

The options are:

Reinstatement of the family's wrongful-death and negligence lawsuit against the sheriff's department. A federal judge dismissed the suit in November.

A federal grand-jury probe.

An inquiry by a state legislative commission.

But Ken Lane, a spokesman for the attorney general, said he thinks the coroner will conduct the

Inquest.

Attorney General Salazar said the Inquest is the best way to publicly air what happened to Rohrbough, who was shot outside the school.

"A coroner's Inquest provides a forum where people can get more information than they can from a grand jury," Lane said. "The whole idea is to find out what is there and make it public."

Lane said it would take weeks, maybe months, to start a legislative investigation. The legislature adjourns in May.

Dan Hopkins, spokesman for Gov. Bill Owens, said Owens has felt all along that District Attorney Dave Thomas was in the best position to decide what direction should be taken, be it grand jury or coroner's Inquest.

If state Rep. Don Lee, R-Littleton, seeks a legislative commission to investigate, Hopkins said, the governor will want to review the format with legislative leaders.

Dobersen, the Arapahoe County coroner, said he doesn't know whether the family's request to defer the inquiry makes Blesch's decision more difficult.

"He simply needs to make a decision on whether a coroner's Inquest at this time would add anything significant to people's understanding of the events," Dobersen said.

Barry Arrington, the lawyer for the Rohrbough family, said he talked with Blesch on Tuesday about his clients' concerns.

"He said he would take our views into account," Arrington said. "But he made no commitment.

"I think Carl is going to do what he thinks is best. Hopefully, that means deferring the Inquest until after we hear from the legislature. If he doesn't, we will support him in full."

The Jefferson County coroner said he has consulted a wide variety of people about the Inquest, including El Paso County Sheriff John Anderson. Anderson's office is conducting an independent investigation of Rohrbough's shooting at the request of Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone.

# The people of Columbine

A variety of people are involved in ongoing Columbine developments. Here are brief sketches of each and a summary of the investigative options now attracting the most serious consideration:

## DANIEL ROHRBOUGH:

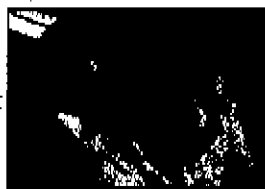
Daniel, 15, was one of two students killed outside Columbine High on April 20, 1999. He was hit by three bullets. His parents claim in federal court papers that Denver police Sgt. Dan O'Shea fired at least one of those shots and that not all were fired by Dylan Klebold or Eric Harris as officials say.



## SUSAN PETRONE and BRIAN ROHRBOUGH:

Daniel's mother and father have been pushing for additional investigations into their son's death for almost three years. Their federal wrongful-death and negligence lawsuit against the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office

was dismissed in November — along with lawsuits by several other victims' families. They are trying to get the lawsuit reinstated by U.S. District Judge Wiley Daniel or the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.



## DAVE THOMAS:

The Jefferson County district attorney has asked the county coroner to hold a public coroner's inquest into Daniel Rohrbough's death to determine who shot the teenager.



## BARRY ARRINGTON:

A former state lawmaker and the Rohrbough family's lawyer, Arrington is pushing for a legislative commission to



investigate Columbine. The commission would have subpoena power and could explore broad aspects of the Columbine shooting and subsequent Jefferson County Sheriff's Office investigation.

## DON LEE: A

Republican state representative whose district includes Columbine, Lee likely would chair the legislative commission. He's waiting to see if the U.S. attorney for Colorado convenes a federal grand jury before pushing ahead with the commission. The House likely would create the commission by approving a resolution.



## CARL BLESCH:

The Jefferson County coroner will announce today whether to hold an inquest.



## JOHN SUTHERS:

The U.S. attorney for Colorado is considering a request from the Rohrbough family to convene a federal grand jury to look into a police coverup over who shot their son. A federal grand jury's proceedings would not be public unless an indictment is handed up.



## JOHN

## ANDERSON:

The El Paso County sheriff is conducting an investigation into whether "friendly fire" killed Rohrbough. Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone requested the probe last month.



# First parole bid denied for Columbine gun seller

By Howard Pankratz  
Denver Post Legal Affairs Writer

**Thursday, January 17, 2002** - In his first bid for freedom, parole was denied Wednesday to the man who sold Columbine killers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold a semiautomatic handgun, one of four guns used during the 1999 rampage.

Mark Edward Manes, 24, was released from prison six months ago and is living in a Lakewood halfway house. He's been working at a computer-programming job.

While no Columbine victims' families attended the parole hearing because they weren't notified in advance, several applauded the denial of parole.

"He was obviously directly involved in the deaths of 13 people," said Bruce Beck, whose step-daughter, Lauren Townsend, was one of 10 people killed in the school library. "Someone needs to take responsibility. I know he has. But he can't expect a slap on the wrist."

Brian Rohrbough, father of slain student Daniel Rohrbough, said the parole board made the right decision.

"He is one of the people directly responsible for all the suffering surrounding Columbine," Rohrbough said. "To put him back in society just isn't right considering all the suffering."

Manes pleaded guilty in August 1999 to providing a handgun to a minor and possession of a dangerous weapon. He was sentenced to six years in prison.

"At this point, I can only hope that Mr. Manes is truly sorry for his involvement and the deaths and injuries that resulted from it," said Brad Bernall, father of slain student Cassie Bernall. "Hopefully, when he is finally released, he will be smarter and have a desire to live within the law as a free, responsible citizen."

Speaking softly and briefly during the hearing, Manes told the board, "I have a lot going for me. I have grown a lot since this incident."

Manes said that as a young man, he had a severe drug and alcohol problem and supported his habit by selling drugs.

Manes' parents, Mike and Diann Manes, told the parole board they would provide the utmost support for their son if parole was granted.

"Mark is doing an excellent job now in supporting himself and has a bright career path in front of him," Mike Manes said.

Diann Manes said her son "is committed to doing well."

Three hours after they spoke, however, the board denied parole.

The board said Manes could reapply in a year.

Bob Ransome, Manes' lawyer, said the decision was disappointing, as was the original sentence, which Ransome called excessive.

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/news\\_columnists/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_86\\_943589,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/news_columnists/article/0,1299,DRMN_86_943589,00.html)

### Littwin: Don't lose the Columbine momentum



Mike Littwin

The momentum, suddenly, is irresistible. The tape did that. The Jim Taylor tape -- revealing that the since-fired Arapahoe County deputy lied to someone -- changed everything.

And now, anything is possible.

A Columbine lawsuit, once dropped, could be reinstated. A U.S. attorney, in considering a request for a federal grand jury, can't ignore the possibility that cops from varying jurisdictions may not be telling the entire truth. The legislature, meanwhile, is considering holding its own investigation.

**Everything's possible**, up to and including a disastrous mistake.

For Brian Rohrbough and Sue Petrone, there is this possibility: To get at the truth, they could inadvertently let Jefferson County off the hook.

This is the day Jefferson County Coroner Carl Blesch is expected to announce whether he'll conduct an inquest into the death of their son, Daniel Rohrbough.

This was a request -- coming from the reluctant DA Dave Thomas and following the electric release of the Taylor tape -- that Blesch would find hard to refuse. The pressure was too great. There were too many questions, asked very publicly, that needed answers.

Nearly three years after the shootings at Columbine High School, it looked as if something had to be done to address the contradictions, and an inquest -- held in public, with subpoena power -- seemed an enlightened choice.

**The problem with** grand jury testimony is that, without an indictment, it remains secret. The idea is to find answers. And with an inquest, Jefferson County would, in effect, finally be admitting it's time for some hands-on-the-Bible self-examination.

And then, in a surprise move, Daniel's parents requested that Blesch delay his decision.

You know what that means. If I were Blesch, I know I'd waste no time honoring that request. If he postpones his decision, he's only acceding to the parents' wishes. Nobody could blame him for that.

If you're wondering why the parents want a postponement, it's not as strange as it sounds. The civil suit, which they hope to have reinstated, has always been their first choice. Failing that, a federal grand jury would conceivably go wherever the truth would lead. And the legislature, as state Rep. Don Lee has proposed, could set up a committee with subpoena power.

**The parents are** worried that an inquest into their son's death would be too narrow for truth-finding. They want all the deaths investigated. They want a thorough investigation of the sheriff department's Columbine-related activities -- before, during and after the shootings.

But there is risk for the parents. This is a roll of the dice. According to those who should know, the judge probably won't reinstate the civil case. And few expect U.S. Attorney John Suthers to convene a federal grand jury. That would leave the legislature.

If Lee, whose son was in the Columbine cafeteria that day, can get the votes for a committee, there is still the problem of forming a group free of politics that would bravely go where the governor's commission did not.

And as we know, committees are famously committee-like. When they make findings, they tend to come out like committee findings, heavy on compromise and couched language and short on definitive answers.

And here's the danger. If this is left to the legislature and Daniel's parents still don't get the answers they want, where do they go from there? The parents say they want an inquest only as a last resort. But momentum doesn't last forever. It could be a year or more before the legislature would deliver a finding. Without public pressure, it would be easy enough for Jefferson County to say that the legal system and the legislative system already have spoken and that enough, finally, is enough.

The parents are right that a coroner's inquest would necessarily be narrow in scope. But it would not be so narrow that it would fail to deliver Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone in public, under oath, with the whole world watching.

It could even be beneficial to narrow the focus to one incident. Let's go back to the case of the legislature. How many resources (read: funds) would go to an investigation? Would there be enough to thoroughly investigate a crime as complex as Columbine? And, if not, what gets left out?

An inquest would force the sheriff's department to answer the specific question Daniel Rohrbough's parents have raised.

If the inquest showed a pattern of police inconsistencies, somebody would have to act.

If an inquest -- as the parents believe -- couldn't positively identify Klebold and Harris as the ones who killed Daniel Rohrbough, someone would have to act.

If an inquest turned Columbine fatigue into public outrage, you can be sure there would be no lack of actors.

If making one tape public focused everyone's attention, imagine what a public inquest would do. Now imagine if that opportunity ends up being lost.

*Mike Littwin's column appears Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Call him at (303) 892-5428 or e-mail him at [littwinm@rockymountainnews.com](mailto:littwinm@rockymountainnews.com).*

**January 17, 2002**

**MORE LITWIN COLUMNS »**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_943649,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_943649,00.html)

### Man who sold gun used by Columbine killers is denied parole

By Hector Gutierrez, News Staff Writer

Mark Manes, convicted of selling a handgun to one of the Columbine killers, was denied parole Wednesday.

Manes, 24, was moved to a community corrections halfway house last June.

Robert Ransome, Manes' lawyer, said that Manes has been a productive member of society as he serves the remainder of his six-year sentence in the halfway house.

"We're disappointed, but it was not unexpected," Ransome said, after the board denied Manes parole.

Donald Fleming, the father of Kelly Ann Fleming, a Columbine student killed in the attack, said the board's decision to deny parole was appropriate considering the magnitude of the attack.

"I think it's a good thing," Fleming said. "The sentence for my child was forever, and he got, what, six years, and now he's in a halfway house?"

Manes pleaded guilty to providing a TEC-DC9 assault pistol to a minor and being in possession of a sawed-off shotgun.

The TEC-DC9 and shotgun were among the four weapons used by Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold during the April 20, 1999, rampage at Columbine High School.

Contact Hector Gutierrez at (303) 892-5204 or at [gutierrezh@RockyMountainNews.com](mailto:gutierrezh@RockyMountainNews.com).

**January 17, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

**sections**  
metro | obits  
business  
life | golf  
sports | weather

**online features**  
ap wire | menbc  
cinema guide  
gazette services  
quick facts

**market place**  
classified  
careers | coupons  
real estate | auto  
print ads online

**Subscribe Today!**



January 17, 2002

## Colorado briefings

### Southwest gets Hot Shot fire crew

DURANGO - Southwest Colorado is getting its first Hot Shot crew that will be available 24 hours a day and seven days a week to help fight fires in the region and around the country.

The 20 members of the San Juan Interagency Hot Shot Crew will be trained to fight major wildland fires, parachuting into hard-to-access areas if necessary.

During slow times they can respond to local fires and in the winter they will work on prescribed-burn projects, said Mark Lauer, fire management officer for the San Juan Public Lands Center and supervisor of the new crew.

Lauer said Durango was selected as home for the crew because of its proximity to recent wildfires and its central location.

### Columbine gun seller denied release

DENVER - A man who sold a semiautomatic handgun to the Columbine killers was denied release Wednesday by a parole board.

A second parole hearing for Mark Manes was scheduled in one year, his lawyer, Robert Ransome, said.

Manes, 24, has served two years of a six-year sentence on gun charges.

He sold Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris the TEC-DC9 they used along with other weapons in the April 20, 1999, rampage that left 15 people dead and two dozen wounded.

### Teacher suspended for bomb at fair

KIOWA - A teacher in the Kiowa School District has been suspended with pay and a student is under investigation for a project that left police removing an inert bomb from the Kiowa science fair.

The device could not explode, but the student had the ingredients necessary to make a live bomb, said Mike Knight, a spokesman for the 18th Judicial District Attorney's Office.

Gregory Kruthaupt, superintendent of the Kiowa district, said the teacher was placed on paid administrative leave.

News services



# Coroner: No Rohrbough inquest

Renewed trauma for Columbine survivors cited, but door still open to future inquiry

By Kieran Nicholson and Howard Pankratz  
Denver Post Staff Writers

**Friday, January 18, 2002** - Jefferson County's coroner declined Thursday to convene an inquest into the death of Columbine freshman Daniel Rohrbough, saying he didn't want to retraumatize student witnesses who point to Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold as the killers and not a police officer.



Blesch

"There were more than 20 statements taken from innocent survivors," Coroner Carl Blesch said, "and every single one of those statements indicates that the shooters in this case were Mr. Harris and Mr. Klebold."

"My obligation as coroner, if I conducted an inquest, would be to put the survivors on the witness stand in open court and make them relive the absolute worst day of their lives," Blesch said. "I am not willing to do that at this time."

He said an inquest would serve "no purpose" in altering the public record about the cause and manner of Rohrbough's death. But Blesch said he wouldn't rule out a future inquest if additional evidence surfaces through other investigative options the Rohrbough family is pursuing.

Daniel's father, Brian Rohrbough, who had asked Blesch to delay the inquest, nonetheless disagreed with the coroner's reasoning.

Rohrbough said witness statements are unreliable. In federal court papers filed last month, the family claimed a bullet from Denver SWAT Sgt. Dan O'Shea hit their son. O'Shea and authorities in Denver and Jefferson County say that's not true.

"I would rely far more on ballistics evidence than I would on eyewitnesses," Rohrbough said.

He insisted Thursday that Daniel, 15, was shot from in front by police fire and not from behind by Harris or Klebold.

Blesch said he needs more evidence that someone other than Harris or Klebold fired any of the three bullets that struck Daniel Rohrbough before he puts students on the witness stand.

"I am going to have to have a very good reason to proceed to an inquest when the human tragedy of this can result in the re-victimization of those witnesses," he said.

Jefferson County District Attorney Dave Thomas had asked Blesch on Monday to convene the inquest, which is similar to a grand jury proceeding but open to the public. Inquests are rarely used in Colorado.

Appearing alongside Blesch at an afternoon news conference, Thomas said he supported Blesch's decision, partly because the Rohrboughs had asked for a delay.

"When I initially proposed the coroner's inquest, I had only one desire, and that is to try to bring some constructive process to this fact-finding process that seems to be swirling in the media," he

said. "And I wanted it to be done in an open forum."

Late Thursday, Colorado Attorney General Ken Salazar called for a complete public airing of the evidence over who shot Daniel Rohrbough. He said that to bring closure, all information related to the April 20, 1999, massacre should be made public, including information from the various investigations spawned by the tragedy.

Harris and Klebold killed 13 people and wounded two dozen others before committing suicide in the worst school shooting in U.S. history.

"There should be no withholding of information or any impression that any information is being withheld, and this includes information from autopsy reports as well as other internal investigations that have been conducted with respect to the response and investigation that occurred related to the Columbine killings," Salazar said.

The Rohrbough family had asked Blesch on Tuesday to delay the inquest while it pursues three other options. Those options would explore broader issues of how all the Columbine victims died, the overall police response to Columbine and whether there was a cover-up over who shot Daniel.

The options are:

Reinstatement of the family's wrongful-death and negligence lawsuit against the Sheriff's Department. A federal judge dismissed the suit in November.

A federal grand-jury probe.

An inquiry by a state legislative commission.

"I don't know whether any of these other alternatives are going to pan out or play out at all," Thomas said.

Blesch said he didn't want to interfere with plans for a grand jury or legislative commission. He also wants to await results of an El Paso County Sheriff's Department investigation into Columbine, requested by the Jefferson County sheriff last month.

If any of those investigations yield new evidence "with respect to the manner and death of Danny Rohrbough, I will revisit convening an inquest at that time," Blesch said.

[Printable View](#)

[Email a Copy of this Article](#)

[Return to top](#)

# Blesch's decision accepted

By Kieran Nicholson and Howard Pankratz  
Denver Post Staff Writers

**Friday, January 18, 2002** - The decision not to pursue a coroner's Inquest into the death of Columbine student Daniel Rohrbough was met with relief by the slain 15-year-old's father.

Jefferson County Coroner Carl Blesch, in declining to proceed with the investigation, said he didn't want to retraumatize witnesses by making them testify during an Inquest.

"(Blesch) cites that it would be harmful to the eyewitnesses, and I think it probably would be," Brian Rohrbough said.

Rohrbough said he also feared that a public coroner's Inquest might create a circus atmosphere.

Rich Petrone, Daniel's stepfather, said he didn't mind that Blesch decided not to pursue the Inquest now. But he was disappointed by the coroner's strong belief that Dylan Klebold or Eric Harris killed Rohrbough.

"For someone who didn't want to get involved, he had a very strong position," Petrone said. "It didn't sit well with me."

Daniel's family asked Blesch on Tuesday not to hold an Inquest because they are pursuing other options and feared an Inquest could sidetrack those.

The Rohrbough family is hoping that a legislative commission will look into not only Daniel's death at Columbine, but also other events before and after the shooting, including allegations that evidence has been withheld as part of a cover-up.

"The legislature being involved would allow a private deposition, and a hearing, and then a full report, so ultimately it is made public," Rohrbough said. "But it is not made public as it is going on. And that has a huge benefit."

State Rep. Don Lee, R-Littleton, who represents the Columbine area, is researching the idea of a legislative commission. Thursday's decision by the coroner has no bearing on that research, he said.

Lee said he is still looking into how the commission would be put together, but he said Reps. Shawn Mitchell, R-Broomfield, and Glenn Scott, R-Westminster, would sit on the panel if one is formed.

Mitchell is a lawyer and Scott is a Columbine graduate, Lee said.

The Rohrbough family has also requested that U.S. Attorney John Suthers impanel a federal grand jury to examine Columbine.

A Suthers spokesman said there is no timetable on a decision.

Earlier this week, Gov. Bill Owens and Attorney General Ken Salazar both supported a coroner's Inquest. Owens spokesman Dan Hopkins said Thursday that the governor declined to comment until he could review the reasoning behind Blesch's decision.

"The attorney general respects the coroner's wishes to not hold an Inquest at this time," said Ken Lane, Salazar's spokesman.

*Denver Post staff writer Trent Selbert contributed to this report.*

**[Printable View](#)**

**[Email a Copy of this Article](#)**

**[Return to top](#)**

# Jeffco fights Rohrbough suit

By Howard Pankretz  
Denver Post Legal Affairs Writer

**Friday, January 18, 2002** - A lawsuit against the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office should not be reinstated because the parents of slain Columbine student Daniel Rohrbough no longer claim he was killed by a sheriff's deputy, lawyers for the department said Thursday in U.S. District Court.

Attorney Bernard Woessner said in court papers that lawyers for Rohrbough's parents had blamed a sheriff's deputy for Daniel's death, claiming their allegation was based on statements of an unidentified teacher and a police officer.

Now, the Rohrbough lawyers have acknowledged that their allegation was mistaken and are now accusing Denver police SWAT Sgt. Dan O'Shea, Woessner wrote.

Woessner said the earlier allegations "tarnished the reputations" of 11 sheriff's department employees named in the lawsuit. The Rohrboughs should ask that the claims against the deputies be dismissed rather than asking that the lawsuit be reinstated, Woessner told U.S. District Judge Lewis Babcock.

What's more, Woessner added, the lawyers for the Rohrboughs base their claim against O'Shea on the affidavit of a person who didn't witness the Columbine attack.

Babcock dismissed the Rohrboughs' lawsuit, and seven others, in November. One lawsuit, by the family of slain teacher Dave Sanders, is still pending.

[Printable View](#)

[Email a Copy of this Article](#)

[Return to top](#)

# Release all records, data, Salazar urges

By Howard Penkrat  
Denver Post Legal Affairs Writer

**Friday, January 18, 2002** - Colorado Attorney General Ken Salazar on Thursday called for any public safety agency that had anything to do with the Columbine shootings or investigation to release all records and information.

In a letter to three Jefferson County officials - Sheriff John Stone, Coroner Carl Blesch and District Attorney Dave Thomas - and El Paso County Sheriff John Anderson, Salazar requested that:

All information related to the April 20, 1999, massacre be released since the criminal investigation and prosecutions of the two killers and their accomplices is over. Salazar said there should be no withholding of information or any impression that any information is being withheld, including information from autopsy reports as well as other internal investigations.

All agencies involved in the Columbine investigation should provide Anderson and his investigators with all the assistance necessary - including their expertise and resources - to determine whether Daniel Rohrbough was killed by "friendly fire" or by Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold.

Stone asked Anderson last month to conduct the investigation.

After Anderson completes his investigation, a coroner's inquest should be considered.

Blesch should review Anderson's report and decide if an inquest would be useful, Salazar wrote. If necessary, the inquest could include hearings and subpoena witnesses so all information is made public. If there are other issues the inquest might also delve into, then its scope should be broadened.

After Anderson's investigation and the coroner's actions are completed, a state or county grand jury could be convened to examine any criminal allegations.

[Printable View](#)

[Email a Copy of this Article](#)

[Return to top](#)

# Blesch, Thomas transcripts

By The Denver Post

Friday, January 18, 2002 -

Below is a transcript of the comments of Jefferson County Coroner Carl Blesch and Jefferson County District Attorney Dave Thomas:

## **Blesch:**

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. I'm Carl Blesch, the Jefferson County Coroner. I'll have some remarks after which I will be happy to entertain a few questions from you.

District Attorney Dave Thomas is also here. He may have some remarks or answer some questions as well.

Let me begin by saying that for at least the present time, there will be no coroner's Inquest into the manner and cause of death of Danny Rohrbough at Columbine High School in April of 1999.

I'd like to share with you some of the reasons for this particular decision. But first I want to let you know I received a request from District Attorney Dave Thomas earlier this week and I'd like to make some comments on that request.

When the news media raised the issue of a coroner's Inquest, what seems like quite a long time ago, and was actually just 10 days, all of us in the coroner's office began to look at the statute again and began to reconsider the kinds of things the Inquest is intended to do because, as you know, they are quite rare in Colorado.

The manner and cause of death in modern times is generally dealt with by scientific investigation.

And so as we did that, I came to have some conversations with Mr. Thomas, the district attorney, whom I feel to be a competent and dedicated public servant who made this request for the same reason that I initially thought it to be appropriate. And that is that there are number of issues that some folks have raised with respect to the Columbine tragedy and that an open hearing might be a better venue within which to consider those issues.

Now we recognize that a coroner's Inquest can only deal with the manner and cause of death. And because of that it was necessary for me to consider what the Inquest could accomplish to shed more light than heat in this case.

But I appreciated the district attorney's request and I supported receiving it.

And any blame for turning down this Inquest is mine and mine alone.

Let me tell you a little of my thinking in this regard.

As you know because an Inquest is confined to the manner and cause of death at least some of the issues that have been raised in the Columbine tragedy cannot be reached by a coroner's Inquest at all.

I can't tell you how many Inquests have been done in Colorado in the last two or three decades.

But with the exception of one jurisdiction there have been virtually none.

One or two in the metro area in the last 20 or 30 years.

So we really don't have a lot of models to go by in terms of inquests. But the one thing we know is that the manner and cause of death is all we have the authority to examine.

As all of us know, there is an independent inquiry going on conducted by the El Paso County Sheriff right now. I am told that inquiry will be completed in a few weeks.

And I'm also told that a legislative commission may be convened or a federal grand jury is still under consideration. And because these things are still in process, and because they have potentially broader scope than I can offer, that was part of the consideration I had concerning whether an inquest should go forward.

But there are some other things that weighed heavily upon my consideration.

As you know, I was not the coroner at the time of the Columbine tragedy. So I don't pretend to be a master of the facts of what happened at Columbine. And because I've only been in office for about 11 months, I thought it would be appropriate for me to begin to examine some of the evidence from the Columbine investigations.

One of the things that struck me as I began this review is that there are more than 20 statements taken from innocent survivors - mostly kids who were high school students at Columbine High School at the time of the tragedy - and that these statements, with the expected variations that you always get when you are interviewing people at a critical incident like this, every single one of those statements indicates that the shooters in this case were Mr. Harris and Mr. Klebold.

And I'm talking now about the shooters generally and also tragically the death of Danny Rohrbough.

There may be other evidence that should be considered. Certainly some folks have raised some issues. And I want you to know that I am not discounting those at this time.

But I also want you to know that because there is an overwhelming body of testimonial evidence my obligation as coroner, if I conducted an inquest, would be to put the survivors on the witness stand in open court and make them re-live the absolute, worst day of their lives.

And I am not willing to do that at this time.

I am going to have to have a very good reason to proceed to an inquest when the human tragedy of this can result in the re-victimization of those witnesses.

And so here is what I hope you will think is a common sense plan:

Number one, I am going to wait for the release of the El Paso County investigation and I will consider it carefully.

If there is further evidence that is appropriate to consider with respect to the manner and cause of death of Danny Rohrbough, I will re-visit convening an inquest at that time.

Further, if a legislative hearing or a grand jury reveals that there is information that is contrary to what I have in my possession now, concerning the manner and cause of death of Danny, I will re-

visit the Inquest and at that time potentially make the decision to convene one.

Furthermore, if any interested party wishes to present me with credible evidence that someone other than Harris and Klebold is responsible for the death of Danny Rohrbough I will take that evidence into careful consideration and it may lead me to conclude that I should convene an Inquest at that time.

I want you to understand that my foundational objection to proceeding right now, before there are any other particular pieces of evidence available to me, other than the overwhelming body of evidence that I have in these testimonial statements, which by the way were taken from all sorts of law enforcement agencies than the sheriff's department, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, if I am going to proceed, I'm going to need something that will allow me to do a balancing test.

And that balancing test will be that the potential harm that will be done to witnesses testifying in an open hearing will be outweighed by the public need for further information.

Until that time, I must respectfully decline to proceed with an Inquest.

**Thomas:**

I support the decision of Coroner Carl Blesch.

I think it is obvious from his comments that he and I have had a number of discussions over the past few days. And we have, not only about the concept of the coroner's Inquest, but about how it would be conducted and under what circumstances it would be conducted.

I have to say that when I initially proposed the coroner's Inquest in terms of a formal request, I had only one desire. And that is to try to bring some constructive process to this fact-finding process that seems to be swirling in the media.

And I wanted it to be done in an open forum.

I met with a number of families back on Dec. 20th of last year. And their request was for a grand jury investigation on a number of issues including this one.

The problem that I've expressed many times to the media is that grand juries are secret. The witnesses are sworn to secrecy, the people who participate. It seems to me and still does that the issues surrounding the tragedy at Columbine and particularly the death of Danny Rohrbough needs to be resolved to the public's satisfaction in a public way.

I support this.

I told Mr. Blesch yesterday that he could consider my letter requesting a coroner's Inquest to be a continuing request. That if the circumstances that he described are met I would continue to cooperate and push for that.

I don't know whether any of these other alternatives are going to pan out or play out at all.

I also I have to say that one of the considerations for me was whether Brian Rohrbough and his family supported this. And it has become obvious to me in the last few days that they do not - do not support a coroner's Inquest at this time.

And I was under the misunderstanding that this might be a route where the families could find some closure.

[Printable View](#)

[Email a Copy of this Article](#)

[Return to top](#)

## Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_945062,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_945062,00.html)

### Coroner delays call for Inquest

Daniel Rohrbough's dad backs Blesch's plan until other inquiries play out

By Kevin Vaughan, News Staff Writer

**JEFFERSON COUNTY** -- There will be no coroner's inquest in the death of Columbine student Daniel Rohrbough -- at least for now.

Jefferson County Coroner Carl Blesch on Thursday opted to delay any call for an inquest until other inquiries play out or someone brings him compelling new evidence that contradicts the official version of events.

"I leave the door open for further evidence," Blesch said in a news conference.

The boy's father applauded Blesch's move.

"We're happy with the decision," Brian Rohrbough said. "This is what we hoped he would do."

Blesch said he considered numerous factors and the most compelling was the risk that holding an inquest would again traumatize victims of the deadliest school shooting in U.S. history.

"My job as coroner would be to put the survivors on the stand in open court and make them relive the worst day of their lives, and I am not going to do it at this time," Blesch said.

The question of who killed Daniel was originally raised in April 2000 when his family filed a civil lawsuit alleging that a police officer -- not gunmen Eric Harris or Dylan Klebold -- fired the fatal shot.

The issue is getting new attention after a recent court filing named a Denver police officer as the alleged gunman.

Harris and Klebold stormed Columbine with guns and bombs April 20, 1999. By the time they killed themselves about 45 minutes later, a dozen students and a teacher lay dead or fatally wounded, and more than 20 others suffered injuries.

District Attorney Dave Thomas formally asked Blesch Monday to convene an inquest.

The boy's parents almost immediately asked Blesch to delay any inquest until they could pursue other legal options, including reinstatement of their civil lawsuit against the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office and the school district.

A federal judge dismissed that civil suit and others related to Columbine on Nov. 27.

But it wasn't until Dec. 26, in an effort to revive their lawsuit, that the families of Rohrbough and five other victims filed a motion that named Denver Sgt. Dan O'Shea as the officer alleged to have fired the fatal bullet.

O'Shea has denied that he shot Rohrbough.

In addition to identifying O'Shea, the boy's parents also allege that Jefferson County officials have engaged in a pattern of lies to cover up the 15-year-old's death.

The claim was based, in part, on forensic evidence that is at odds with the official report on the tragedy issued by the sheriff's office in May 2000.

The court filing sparked a flurry of new efforts to examine the boy's death:

- El Paso County Sheriff John Anderson agreed to conduct an independent review of Rohrbough's death. That review is under way.
- Barry Arrington, the attorney for the Rohrbough family, asked U.S. Attorney John Suthers to take the case to a federal grand jury.
- Several state representatives began looking at creating a legislative panel that would have subpoena powers.

Blesch, who has been coroner for only 11 months and has not mastered the Columbine evidence, said he would await the outcome of those other efforts as he continued to consider Thomas' request.

Thomas said he supported Blesch's decision.

State Attorney General Ken Salazar, who had endorsed the coroner's inquest, called for everything about the shootings to be made public.

"There is no viable public interest to withhold any information related to the events," Salazar said in a letter to Anderson and county officials.

Salazar said everyone should wait for Anderson to finish his probe before considering other types of investigations.

Thomas said in making his request for an inquest, he was hoping to resolve the lingering questions about Rohrbough's death in public.

A coroner's inquest would involve impanelling six jurors who would subpoena witnesses and documents and take testimony in open court.

"I had only one desire -- bring some process to the swirling controversy and that it be done in an open forum," Thomas said.

He also said he has not ruled out a county grand jury.

However, he pointed to the fact that grand jury proceedings are secret as a major drawback.

In addition to his concerns about the survivors, Blesch said he was also worried that the narrow scope of a coroner's inquest -- which is designed to determine the "cause and manner" of death -- would prevent the investigation from answering all the lingering questions.

Finally, Blesch said that he had reviewed more than 20 statements from witnesses whose testimony did not contradict the sheriff's office's contention that Harris and Klebold killed Daniel.

"Do I entirely discount that (possibility that an officer killed Daniel)?" Blesch asked. "Of course not."

Brian Rohrbough, asked about those witness statements, said he believes some witnesses were confused not about what they saw but about whom they saw.

"They certainly saw someone," he said. "It's just not Dan."

Contact Kevin Vaughan at (303) 892-5019 or [vaughank@RockyMountainNews.com](mailto:vaughank@RockyMountainNews.com). Staff writer Karen Abbott contributed to this report.

**January 18, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

## Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_944894,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_944894,00.html)

### Jeffco coroner 'right guy' for Columbine Inquest

Blesch 'the kind of guy who looks under every rock,' says Adams County DA

**By Kevin Vaughan, News Staff Writer**

He's been thrust into the middle of political squabbles and pyramid schemes and once even weighed in on the JonBenet Ramsey case.

And this week, Jefferson County Coroner Carl Blesch was thrown into one of the most controversial cases in Colorado history when he was asked to convene an inquest to investigate the death of a Columbine High School student.

"I couldn't think of a better fellow for making that kind of a decision," Adams County District Attorney Bob Grant said.

"He's the right guy in the right place at the right time."

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Grant was a young, "brown haired" prosecutor working drunken driving cases, Blesch was an investigator in the Adams County District Attorney's Office.

In addition to his work as an investigator, he also served as a complaint officer. That means that when police officers brought cases to the office for consideration, they often dealt with Blesch.

Grant remembered an investigation of a pyramid scheme that involved law officers and government employees, saying Blesch handled the delicate situation with professionalism.

In addition to his work in the Adams County District Attorney's Office, Blesch spent time in the Adams County Sheriff's Office, where he rose to the rank of captain, and worked as an investigator in the Jefferson County District Attorney's Office.

He came to law enforcement after first considering a career in law.

Blesch, 52, graduated from Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio, in 1970 with a degree in psychology and political science.

He completed two years at the Duke University law school before he transferred to the University of Denver.

He abandoned plans to become a lawyer when he decided to pursue his interest in law enforcement.

His first job was with the Adams County sheriff's office, where Fred Stoll, now a captain in the department, was his field training officer.

"Even back then, I could tell he was a cut above," Stoll said.

Over the years, he earned a reputation as a thorough investigator with a keen interest in forensic science.

Grant described him as "the kind of guy who looks under every rock and then will dig up the dirt under the rock and look under that."

A licensed physician assistant, Blesch is allowed to practice medicine under the supervision of a doctor.

He was named Jefferson County's coroner on Feb. 27, 2001, after Dr. Nancy Bodelson resigned from the \$53,000-a-year job.

Stoll said that he knew Blesch completely thought out his decision, but that he didn't envy his longtime friend:

"It's one of those things where no matter what he does he's going to make somebody unhappy."

**January 18, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

## Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_945060,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_945060,00.html)

### Brief opposes revival of Columbine lawsuits

Lawyers for officers say new claims of death by friendly fire aren't reason to reopen cases

By Karen Abbott, News Staff Writer

The families of Columbine victims are trying to reinstate their federal civil suits with "exaggeration, name-calling and misrepresentation," lawyers for Jefferson County law officers said Thursday.

Claims by the family of slain student Daniel Rohrbough that he was a victim of friendly fire from Denver police officer Dan O'Shea are no reason to revive the lawsuits, they argued.

The accusations were in legal documents filed in U.S. District Court in response to the families' requests that Denver U.S. District Judge Lewis Babcock reconsider lawsuits he dismissed in November.

Babcock ruled that, though mistakes occurred, actions by law and school officials weren't egregious enough to overcome their immunity from lawsuits.

Among officials named in the suits are Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone; John Kieckbusch, who headed the Columbine investigation; and deputy Neil Gardner, the school's resource officer.

The families have contended they have new evidence about Rohrbough's death and about what officials knew before the Columbine shootings that could have prevented them.

The sheriff's lawyers denied that sheriff's officials wrongly withheld information from the families or misrepresented facts.

They said some information was ordered kept secret by a Jefferson County judge and later leaked to journalists.

"That Plaintiffs are frustrated that the Sheriff Defendants do not agree with Plaintiffs' version of the attack on Columbine High School, are unhappy with the fact that this horrible crime was not prevented and are dissatisfied with portions of the (subsequent) investigation, may be of interest to the media, but has no legally discernible consequence to this case," the response says.

They said the families are seeking "yet another bite at the apple," though they had the opportunity to draft several versions of their legal complaints, to review thousands of documents released by the sheriff's department, to file legal briefs and to argue in court before Babcock.

January 18, 2002

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

## Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/opinion/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_38\\_944451,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/opinion/article/0,1299,DRMN_38_944451,00.html)

### Editorial: Another gift to John Stone

**The issue:** Jeffco coroner declines to call inquest

**Our view:** A mistake, however well-intentioned

So Sheriff John Stone has danced away from the glare of public testimony again. Just when we thought that *someone* was finally going to take seriously a piece of the Columbine puzzle, the Jefferson County coroner rose up Thursday to stomp down even that thin hope.

For now, anyway. He said he isn't closing the door to a coroner's inquest into Daniel Rohrbough's death -- meaning if Rohrbough's parents exhaust their remaining avenues (litigation, grand jury and legislative probe), he'd be willing to consider another request.

Yet as we explained earlier this week, time's a wasting. Columbine occurred nearly three years ago, and what *can* be done now *should* be done now in terms of getting at the truth.

Frankly, we're getting a little tired of public officials -- Judge Brooke Jackson is another example -- who believe their *principal* responsibility is to try to minimize the emotional impact of their decisions on any family close to the Columbine tragedy. What about a larger duty to the community?

Meanwhile, ironically, Sheriff Stone continues telling apparently everyone but his own constituents what he's learned from Columbine. If an expert is someone who's more than 200 miles from home, then Stone certainly qualifies.

For instance, he's going to San Diego Jan. 31 for a speech to the Southern California Juvenile Officers Association on the lessons learned. It's just one of "many" speeches he's given across the country since the 1999 killings. No one seems to know exactly how many.

It's not for the money that he speaks out of state, apparently. His departmental spokeswoman -- who usually does his talking for him locally -- maintains he's been paid only once for a Columbine speech, and he gave the money to a charity.

Of course he does get reimbursed for air fare and is presumably put up in decent hotels. San Diego is said to be very nice this time of year.

It's too bad that Stone doesn't show the same enthusiasm for speaking closer to home. When invited to appear before the governor's Columbine Commission on law enforcement's response, he declined. Ordinary folks in Colorado, it seems, aren't entitled to learn the lessons of Columbine.

Did we mention that those speeches out of state are for law enforcement only and are closed to the media? But of course. Apparently Stone is afraid that anything he says publicly might be used against him in a court of law.

Sure, it's a free country and Stone is permitted to go where he wishes. What's more, under the First Amendment he can say whatever he wants. It's just too bad that he doesn't believe it's worth saying here.

How can we avail ourselves of the lessons he's learned on how to prevent, or at least react to, future Columbines?

Rap. Don Lee, R-Littleton, recently proposed creating a special legislative panel, armed with subpoena powers,

that could compel testimony from those involved in Columbine. No doubt the sheriff would be one of the earliest witnesses called.

We have no way of knowing whether Lee's proposal will be passed by both houses and signed by the governor. The legislature is not an investigative body by nature and rarely uses subpoena power, and fear that the body might go the headline-hunting route favored by congressional committees may make many members nervous.

If the bill fails, we have this one last proposal. Gov. Bill Owens could reconvene the Columbine Commission, have it set up shop on, say, Sanibel Island, Fla., and send Stone an invitation to speak -- along with an airplane ticket and reservations at the Caribe Beach Resort, of course.

**January 18, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

**sections**  
metro | obits  
business  
life | gol  
sports | weather

**online features**  
ap wire | msnbc  
cinema guide  
gazette services  
quick facts

**market place**  
classified  
careers | coupons  
real estate | auto  
print ads online

**Subscribe Today!**



January 18, 2002

## Coroner turns down request for Inquest

The Associated Press

**GOLDEN** - Jefferson County Coroner Carl Blesch decided Thursday not to hold an Inquest into the death of Columbine student Daniel Rohrbough.

District Attorney Dave Thomas had requested a coroner's Inquest in response to claims by Rohrbough's parents that the 15-year-old boy was accidentally shot by police during the April 20, 1999, massacre.

Blesch, however, said during a news conference he didn't want to hold an Inquest while an Independent Investigation into the shootings was going on.

The Jefferson County sheriff's report said Rohrbough was slain by student gunman Dylan Klebold, but his family says the sheriff is covering up evidence. Sheriff John Stone has asked the El Paso County Sheriff's Office to investigate the Rohrboughs' allegations.

Blesch said he also decided against an Inquest because all it would do is explore the manner and cause of death but not other issues raised by the family.

Ch

**AMERICAN**  
REALTY &  
HEALTH  
CENTER



**NE**  
**HOI**  
**CONNE**

## Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/local/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_15\\_946434,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/local/article/0,1299,DRMN_15_946434,00.html)

### Suburban briefs: Police Sgt. O'Shea interviewed

Investigators from the El Paso County Sheriff's Office interviewed Denver Police Sgt. Dan O'Shea on Friday about his actions at Columbine High School.

El Paso County Sheriff John Anderson agreed to conduct an independent review of the death of student Daniel Rohrbough at the request of the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office. Daniel's family claims he was shot by O'Shea by accident. O'Shea has denied it.

"Obviously, we want to get it down as soon as we can," said El Paso sheriff's spokeswoman Lt. Melissa Hartman.

News4 reported O'Shea answered all questions posed to him, offered a timeline of his actions during April 20, 1999, and said he wasn't present when Daniel was shot.

Inmate confined after incident

**LIMON** -- An inmate was confined in a segregated unit at the Limon Correctional Facility after being involved in an incident with a prison employee Friday, state prison officials confirmed.

Prison officials would not confirm whether the incident was an assault on the staff member.

Attacker diagnosed as insane

**PUEBLO** -- A man accused of attacking a woman with rocks on an Aurora sidewalk was insane at the time, a psychiatrist at the Colorado Mental Health Institute says.

Jerry Matherson, 20, was sent there last fall after pleading not guilty by reason of insanity in the attack on Jessica Fulcher.

Environmental health boss quits

Theresa Donahue, head of Denver's Department of Environmental Health, resigned Friday, saying she wants to take some time off.

Donahue has been in the Webb administration since 1991.

Leads sought in man's beating

**ARAPAHOE COUNTY** -- Police are seeking leads in the beating of an Englewood man Tuesday.

John Douglas Miller, 35, was taken to a local hospital, where he was listed in critical condition.

Arapahoe County sheriff's deputies were called at 11:30 p.m. Tuesday to the Illiff Turbo Car Wash, 9875 E. Illiff Ave.

Ex-trooper jailed for sex assault

A former Colorado State Patrol trooper was ordered Friday to spend 90 days behind bars for sexually assaulting a teen-ager while on duty in Gilpin County.

Steve Allen, 29, also was ordered to serve three years probation, submit to treatment and pay fines and court costs.

Allen pleaded guilty Oct. 4. Allen resigned from the force after his April arrest.

Foreign students may face ban

**BOULDER** -- Students from countries on the U.S. State Department's list of rogue nations may be barred from using science labs on the University of Colorado's four campuses.

The government's list includes Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Sudan and Syria.

Police Identify 2 fire victims

Two women found dead after a methamphetamine lab fire were identified by Denver police Friday.

Investigators said Pamela English and Tammy Campbell, both 33, were in the basement of a house at 310 S. Lincoln St. on Wednesday night when the fire broke out.

Two men, Darryl Willis, 47, and James Campbell, 28, escaped with burns. They were being held for further investigation.

Tip leads to suspect's arrest

**NORTHGLENN** -- A 19-year-old murder suspect was behind bars Friday, arrested four months after he was accused of intentionally running over a pedestrian.

Northglenn police arrested George Charles Barela Thursday after receiving a tip.

Denver police had issued a warrant for Barela in connection with the death of 31-year-old Raymond Hernandez, who was killed Sept. 19.

**January 19, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

# Cop says his words' meaning twisted

## 'Nowhere near' slain Columbine student

By David Migoya and Kevin Simpson  
Denver Post Staff Writers

**Sunday, January 20, 2002** - Denver police Sgt. Dan O'Shea says that his comments to a school administrator about "friendly fire" at the Columbine massacre have been misinterpreted as evidence that he killed 15-year-old Daniel Rohrbough.

In an interview, O'Shea also expressed disappointment with a coroner's decision last week not to investigate the boy's death, saying it would have exonerated him.

Rohrbough's family has accused O'Shea of firing the shot that killed the student as he tried to flee the school on April 20, 1999. The family also has alleged a coverup.

"I want this in the public eye. I'm sick and tired of this conspiracy label," said O'Shea, 41, a 16-year veteran of the Denver Police Department and one-time member of its SWAT team.

"I was nowhere near this kid" when he was alive, O'Shea said.

Rohrbough was shot three times outside the school cafeteria, an autopsy shows. The Jefferson County sheriff's Columbine report holds that suicidal gunmen Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold shot the boy with 9mm weapons as he walked up a hill next to a staircase just after the attack began.

Twelve students and a teacher died in the attack.

The report says Klebold fired the fatal shot into Rohrbough's chest, though neither that bullet nor another that went through his left leg was ever recovered.

Brian Rohrbough and Sue Petrone, Daniel's parents, filed papers in federal court Dec. 26 accusing O'Shea of killing their son long after the shooting had begun. The family is seeking reinstatement of a wrongful-death and negligence lawsuit against the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office.

Crucial to their latest allegation is an affidavit from former Jefferson County school administrator Celine Marquez in which she says she talked to O'Shea two days after the shootings.

The Rohrbough lawsuit claims Marquez's recollection is evidence that someone other than Klebold or Harris may have killed Daniel.

In the affidavit, Marquez said an emotional O'Shea told her that he was concerned that "he may have shot an innocent student." She said O'Shea told her "friendly fire" from police could have caused injuries to the students.

She also said O'Shea told her "he was relieved" that ballistic reports determined that no student was injured by a police bullet.

O'Shea told The Denver Post that he met Marquez as he delivered flowers to the director of the preschool his daughter attended. When Marquez said she was the parent of two Columbine students and wanted to thank him, O'Shea said he broke down crying.

"The last time I had seen the parent of a Columbine child, I was covered in blood, and (their children) were MIA," O'Shea said. "I told her that during all of the conflict, my most grievous fear was harming an innocent kid."

O'Shea said he worried that one of the bullets he fired might have hit someone inside the school other than Klebold or Harris.

"It's a huge school with many kids," he said. "You fire even one bullet, (and) there's a chance of harming someone."

Ballistics reports show O'Shea fired his 9mm submachine gun 51 times at the school, more than any other police officer at the scene.

"It wasn't a single shot, it was every single one of them that I fired into that school that concerned me," O'Shea said.

O'Shea said he provided cover fire to aid the rescue of injured students. He first shot his weapon when he returned fire into the library while ambulance workers removed bloodied students from outside the school, he said.

O'Shea said his concerns over shooting into the school were eased when he learned investigators believed students killed in the library were shot at close range.

Jefferson County's version that Klebold shot Rohrbough at close range is contradicted by the absence of shell casings around his son that match weapons fired by the gunmen, Brian Rohrbough said. He points to three bullet casings from O'Shea's weapon found just a few feet from the boy's body.

Rohrbough's parents recently released a tape recording they made of a former Arapahoe County sheriff's deputy telling them he saw their son alive after the shooting began. The deputy, James Taylor, told the family that Rohrbough was gunned down as he tried to flee the school with other students.

Taylor has since his original police report was accurate: He never saw Rohrbough alive at the school. Taylor was fired Jan. 9 for lying to the family.

*David Migoya can be reached at 303-820-1506 or [dmigoya@denverpost.com](mailto:dmigoya@denverpost.com). Kevin Simpson can be reach at 303-820-1739 or at [ksimpson@denverpost.com](mailto:ksimpson@denverpost.com).*

**[Printable View](#)**

**[Email a Copy of this Article](#)**

**[Return to top](#)**



letters

## Columbine Questions

### Unfeeling pressure

**Tuesday, January 22, 2002** - It is a sad day in Denver when both a newspaper - The Post, with its diatribe about the "necessity" of releasing Dylan Klebold's autopsy - and an ignorant letter writer, Mr. Michael Ortiz, make it clear that they have hardened hearts and closed minds when it comes to the poor parents of the Columbine shooters. Columbine affected my community like nothing else, and I have seen good things come of it, but it really makes me question the people I live around when they actually want to inflict more pain on families who have suffered so much.

Dylan Klebold was a minor at the time of his death, so even if people can be so cruel as to not care about his parents' desire to keep his autopsy private, his family's wishes should legally come first. Besides, a summary of that autopsy already has been released. That should be more than enough for voyeuristic members of the media who disguise their hunt for increased sales as a hunt for "truth" (and I'd like to know what "truth" the gory details of a teenager's death will bring to light?) and enough for

Mr. and Mrs. Harris and Mr. and Mrs. Klebold, please don't think everyone in the community is represented by the local media and by people like Michael Ortiz. Many of us are thinking of you and pulling for you.

*KAREN RINN*

*Littleton*

### Time to move on

The Columbine incident was truly unfortunate, but there has to be more news out there, and the Rohrbough family needs to get on with their lives. The world is not a very nice place, and bad things happen to good and innocent people. Always have and always will.

*GARY E. SHOVER*

*Lakewood*

### Study the motive

I have one question. Are the Columbine families interested only in the truth of Columbine to lay their loved ones to rest for the final time? Or are they interested only in the truth so they can sue for more monetary gains? If that is so, it is time to lay the whole matter to rest. Money does not bring back the dead - only supposedly makes life easier for the living.

*JAMES T. EVANS*

*Arvada*

## **PERISHO DISMISSAL**

### **CVA a vital force**

Re: " 'Politics' blamed for Perisho ouster at Metro center," Kyle MacMillan column, Dec. 30.

I am upset and disappointed to learn of Sally Perisho's abrupt dismissal as director of Metropolitan State College of Denver's Center of the Visual Arts. I am a downtown resident of 11 years and have witnessed the growth of the CVA under Perisho's diligent guidance. She has coordinated dynamic historical and contemporary shows by national, international and regional artists that have attracted residents from throughout the metropolitan area. The CVA also has offered hands-on programs for children and European art tours for adults. Sally Perisho has won many awards for her accomplishments, including the Governor's Award for excellence in the arts in 2001.

Without Sally Perisho as director, my continuing support to the Center of the Visual Arts has dwindled.

JOAN CAMOZZI

Denver

### **Petty politics**

I am one of numerous Denver-area art lovers who are appalled by the unjustified firing of Sally L. Perisho, director of the Metropolitan State College Center for the Visual Arts. I believe Metro President Sheila Kaplan and Vice President of Marketing Carolyn Wollard will deeply regret their blatantly unfair action, as will all at Metro State who remained silent and let this happen. I have followed Perisho's career and contributions for 25 years and must particularly applaud her work at the center these past 10 years. Perisho is the acknowledged benchmark of her profession. She brought Metro State to national prominence. Perisho came to this community to create; Kaplan and Wollard came to spoil and destroy. It sickens me to see a Colorado legend in the arts brought down by greed and petty academic politics.

GAYLE L. NOVAK

Denver

*The writer is a former volunteer for the Metropolitan State College Center for the Visual Arts.*

### **Afghan adoptions unlikely any time soon**

Re: "Next step, adoptions?", The Open Forum Jan. 13.

Even with a new government, adoption from Afghanistan won't soon become a reality. For several reasons, adoption from the Middle East always have been difficult.

The governments are unwilling to adopt Muslim children to non-Muslim couples. Adoption is not mentioned in Sharia law, which is interpreted by many Muslim countries to mean it is not allowed. Relatives are expected to take in children who are orphaned. In some Middle Eastern societies, there is a cultural bias against adoption, which means that those adoptions that do take place are done secretly.

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_953739,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_953739,00.html)

### Columbine Judge won't reconsider lawsuits

By Karen Abbott, News Staff Writer

A federal judge refused Wednesday to reconsider his dismissals in November of lawsuits filed against sheriff's officers and school officials by families of several slain and injured Columbine High School students.

Denver U.S. District Judge Lewis Babcock said in written rulings that new assertions by the family of slain student Danny Rohrbough -- that Denver Police Sgt. Dan O'Shea's "friendly fire" killed the boy and law officers conspired to cover up the truth -- do not overcome the legal reasons for dismissing their claims.

He also said newly released public excerpts from one teen gunman's diary, indicating the attack was planned a year in advance, wasn't enough to persuade him that officials should have known in advance about the attack plan and stopped it.

Babcock ruled in late November that, although mistakes were made at Columbine and afterward, the families did not present evidence of official wrongdoing so egregious as to overcome the officials' legal immunity from lawsuits.

Columbine seniors Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold attacked the suburban Jefferson County high school with guns and bombs on April 20, 1999. They killed 12 students and a teacher, and wounded more than 20 other people, before taking their own lives in the school library.

Besides the family of Danny Rohrbough, Babcock ruled similarly Wednesday in lawsuits filed against the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department and Jefferson County Public Schools by the families of slain students Kelly Fleming, Matthew Kechter, Lauren Townsend, Kyle Velasquez and Isalah Shoels; and injured students Richard Castaldo, Sean Graves, Lance Kirklin, Kacey Rueggesser, and Evan Todd.

**January 23, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

# Judge won't reinstate Columbine lawsuits

Ruling all but ends families' fight, analysts say

By Howard Pankratz and Kieran Nicholson  
Denver Post Staff Writers

**Thursday, January 24, 2002** - A federal judge Wednesday refused to reinstate wrongful-death and negligence lawsuits filed by families of 15 students injured or killed in the Columbine rampage, bringing what legal experts called an all-but-certain end to their cases.

## WHAT'S NEXT

Lawyers say the Columbine families now have an automatic right to appeal U.S. District Judge Lewis Babcock's ruling to the Denver-based 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. Each of the families has 30 days to file a notice of intent to appeal with the circuit court.

Babcock has urged an appeal, saying the Columbine cases present significant questions of law where there can be legitimate grounds for differences of opinions. The Columbine families believe that the Columbine tragedy is so unique that it may result in changing U.S. law that grants widespread immunity to law enforcement and school districts.

Denver lawyer Scott Robinson says he believes the appeals process could take three to five years if it goes to both the circuit court and the U.S. Supreme Court.

In the meantime, the family of slain student Daniel Rohrbough also is seeking a federal grand-jury probe or a legislative-commission inquiry. The El Paso County sheriff also is

"It slams the door shut on a lot of victims and survivors of Columbine," said lawyer and legal analyst Craig Silverman.

Only one of 10 lawsuits filed almost two years ago against the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office and school district remains - that relating to slain teacher Dave Sanders. That suit contends rescuers, by taking more than three hours to reach the wounded teacher, allowed him to die.

The most controversial allegation in the nine dismissed suits came from the family of slain student Daniel Rohrbough: that a Denver SWAT officer fatally shot their son on April 20, 1999. Other allegations in the suits contended authorities took too long to storm the school and failed to prevent the massacre months before it happened.

Sue Petrone, Rohrbough's mother, said she was disappointed but not surprised by the ruling.

"Everything has been an uphill battle," she said. "Either way, we were planning on going to the (U.S. 10th Circuit Court of Appeals)."

But Silverman and other lawyers doubt the appeals court will restore the lawsuits. It could take months or years for the court to rule.

"I would be even more surprised if they (the families) find relief from the 10th Circuit," said Denver lawyer Dan Recht.

Acting Jefferson County Attorney Bill Tuthill said the evidence and dozens of eyewitness accounts clearly show that only suicidal gunmen Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold should bear the blame for the deaths of the 12 students and one teacher killed at Columbine.

"We hope Judge Babcock's ruling puts an end to the unfounded allegations against our law-enforcement community," Tuthill said.

U.S. District Judge Lewis Babcock initially dismissed the suits Nov. 27, citing widespread governmental immunity for police in the face of life-threatening emergencies.

But the families asked Babcock to reconsider based on additional evidence, including witness statements not presented in the original lawsuits that they said implicated Denver police Sgt. Dan O'Shea in Rohrbough's killing.

Among the statements was an affidavit filed in court Dec. 26 from a former

Investigating whether a law officer shot Rohrbough and Jefferson County authorities covered it up.

school administrator who said O'Shea told her two days after the shootings that he feared he had shot a student that day.

But O'Shea said the administrator misconstrued his words.

Last week, the Jefferson County coroner declined to hold an inquest into Rohrbough's death.

Babcock's ruling Wednesday "stops the momentum the Rohrboughs have had since the bombshells about Dan O'Shea and Deputy Jim Taylor. They won't be able to put people under oath and find out the truth because of Babcock's ruling," said Silverman.

Taylor is a former Arapahoe County sheriff's deputy who was tape-recorded telling Rohrbough's family that he saw Daniel fall as he fled the school, implying that the 15-year-old was still alive when police arrived.

But Taylor later admitted to investigators that he had never seen Rohrbough alive at the school, and was fired Jan. 9 for lying.

"We knew we faced an uphill battle to get Judge Babcock to change his mind, but we thought the new evidence was compelling, and we had to try," said lawyer Barry Arrington, who represents Daniel Rohrbough's parents and the families of four other Columbine victims.

"My clients remain determined to find out the truth," Arrington said.

Legal analysts said Wednesday they didn't expect Babcock to rule otherwise.

"I would have been shocked to my socks if he had reinstated the lawsuits," said Denver lawyer and media analyst Scott Robinson.

"Law-enforcement agencies can only be sued for failure to prevent a crime if by their actions they either created the danger or enhanced it. In general, you cannot sue the police for not doing their job well. There is nothing like police malpractice."

Robinson said the U.S. Supreme Court for years has discouraged lawsuits against police who often find themselves in rapidly evolving, highly dangerous situations where split-second decisions are necessary.

"And schools have no special relationship to the children - no duty to protect the children in school from injury or death by third parties, even if the third party is another student," Robinson said.

Phyllis Velasquez, the mother of slain student Kyle Velasquez, said her family hasn't decided what impact the ruling will have on them.

"I am not sure what we are going to do at this point," said Velasquez.

Still, there remain unanswered questions in Velasquez's mind why it took so long for police to reach the Columbine library where her son died.

"There are just so many things that are left unanswered for all of the families," she said. "Some of them are just little things, but we need answers."

Velasquez said that despite the ruling, she still questions who killed Daniel Rohrbough.

But in Wednesday's ruling, Babcock said that until Dec. 26, when the Rohrbough family filed new

court papers, the family had not specifically identified O'Shea as the alleged killer of their son. But he said that didn't change his original ruling.

He also said the Rohrboughs' new claim - that there was a law-enforcement "pattern of falsification and deceit" - would also not change his original decision.

The Rohrbough family also had claimed that new revelations from Harris' journal showed Jefferson County sheriff's investigators should have searched the Harris home months before the massacre, possibly preventing it.

But Babcock noted Wednesday that the issue already had been raised previously in the Rohrbough lawsuit and he had dismissed the case anyway.

[\*\*Printable View\*\*](#)

[\*\*Email a Copy of this Article\*\*](#)

[\*\*Return to top\*\*](#)

## Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_954725,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_954725,00.html)

### Officer views Columbine tapes

#### He says TV footage shows he didn't shoot Rohrbough

By Lynn Bartels, News Staff Writer

Denver police Sgt. Dan O'Shea says TV footage of Columbine on the day of the attack backs his contention that he did not shoot student Daniel Rohrbough.

O'Shea reviewed tapes from two Denver stations Wednesday and said Channel 7's aerial footage vindicates him.

O'Shea said Channel 7 captured all four occasions that he fired shots at Columbine High School. He said Rohrbough was already dead when he first opened fire.

Dozens of metro police officers responded when seniors Eric Harris, 18, and Dylan Klebold, 17, attacked their school April 20, 1999.

"Daniel Rohrbough was shot by Klebold and Harris right at the outset before anybody had a chance to dial 9, much less 911," O'Shea told Channel 7 reporter Julie Hayden. "I just want my life back. I don't want to go to work and worry about somebody reading my nametag and saying, 'Oh yeah, you're the one.' "

Rohrbough's parents named O'Shea as their son's killer in federal court papers last month.

O'Shea told Channel 9 reporter Ginger Delgado that he sympathizes with the parents' frustration with Jefferson County's official report of the shootings, but that he doesn't feel he deserves to be attacked.

"I understand their pain, but that doesn't give them the right to destroy my life," he said. "They just need to stop."

Rich Petrone, the stepfather of the 15-year-old slain student, said his family is not out to ruin O'Shea.

"We just want the truth," he said.

Petrone said the family will review TV broadcasts of the footage.

Delgado said O'Shea looked at Channel 9's footage but did not find anything relevant.

O'Shea and his attorney, David Bruno, also asked to review footage from Channel 4, but the station turned them down.

"They requested access to our raw videotapes under conditions that were journalistically and ethically unacceptable to us," news director Angie Kucharski said.

She declined to elaborate. O'Shea did not give that station an interview.

Bruno said Channels 7 and 9 were "very cooperative" with O'Shea, but there was no deal offering an interview in exchange for footage.

He said that after viewing the tapes, O'Shea felt "comfortable" giving interviews to Hayden and Delgado.

Delgado said she and Hayden had spoken to O'Shea almost daily since last month.

"He trusted us. He said, 'I think you both understand where I'm coming from,' " Delgado said.

Both reporters are married to police officers.

News 4 did not interview O'Shea but on Wednesday aired its aerial footage from April 20, tracking O'Shea's movements.

"The tape does not resolve the key question: Did Sgt. O'Shea shoot Daniel Rohrbough at Columbine," reporter Rick Salinger said in his introduction.

O'Shea told Channel 7 that the first time he opened fire, he exchanged shots with Harris and Klebold, who were trying to ambush ambulance crews.

He said he fired into the school rather than stand by and "watch these paramedics be slaughtered."

He said he fired other times to provide cover as officers checked Daniel's body on the sidewalk.

O'Shea also said his statement to a Jefferson County school administrator two days after Columbine has been misconstrued. Rohrbough's family claims he broke down, saying he thought he had shot a student but was relieved to find that ballistics reports indicated no one died from friendly fire.

In fact, the ballistics report hadn't been done.

O'Shea said he was referring to his fear that he may have hit someone in the library. He had just learned all students there were killed at close range.

*Contact Lynn Bartels at (303) 892-5327 or bartels@RockyMountainNews.com. News staff writer Jeff Kass contributed to this report.*

**January 24, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_954685,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_954685,00.html)

### Federal judge turns away Columbine lawsuits

Victims' families pin hopes on appeals, possible inquiries by U.S. attorney, legislature

By Karen Abbott, News Staff Writer

A federal judge refused Wednesday to revive the Columbine lawsuits he threw out in November, saying families' claims of newly discovered evidence and a law enforcement cover-up still aren't enough to overcome the rules that prohibit suing the government.

Families who sued Jefferson County sheriff's officers and public school officials now are pinning their hopes on the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals and a variety of proposed investigative avenues, including a federal grand jury and a legislative probe.

Lawyer Stephen Wahlberg said the families of injured students Sean Graves and Lance Kirklin will join today in other families' requests to Colorado U.S. Attorney John Suthers for a federal grand jury probe and for the legislature to launch an investigation.

The families of slain students Brian Rohrbough, Kelly Fleming, Lauren Townsend, Matthew Kechter and Kyle Velasquez already have asked Suthers for a grand jury investigation. Suthers has not announced a decision.

"He sent me a letter, oh, I guess a day or so ago, asking if I had any more facts," Barry Arrington, the attorney for those families, said Thursday.

"Of course, all the facts we had, we told him. If he wants us to do an investigation before he determines whether there's a need for an investigation, I guess we have a classic Catch-22."

Suthers' spokesman Jeff Dorschner responded, "Before a final decision is made, the United States attorney wants to make sure he has all available information from Mr. Arrington and his clients."

Arrington said his clients will appeal Judge Lewis Babcock's ruling to the 10th Circuit and "fully support" the idea of a legislative investigation as well.

"While we do not know all of the facts, two things are absolutely clear from the forensic evidence," Arrington said in a prepared statement.

"One, what the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department's 'official report' said happened on April 20, 1999, simply could not have happened.

"Two, when it issued its 'official report' the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department knew what it said happened could not have happened.

"Why have we been lied to? We don't know, which is why an investigation by an unbiased third party with subpoena powers is so crucial," Arrington said.

"This was destined for the 10th Circuit (court of appeals) no matter what he did today," Brian Rohrbough said of Babcock's decision.

Despite the new allegations raised by the families in their motion asking Babcock to reconsider his decision, Rohrbough said he was not surprised by the ruling.

The Rohrboughs have alleged that Denver police Sgt. Dan O'Shea's "friendly fire" killed their son and that law officers hid the truth. They and other families also alleged that newly public excerpts from one teen gunman's diary showed that law enforcement and school officials could have -- and should have -- known about the attack plan up to 13 months in advance and acted to prevent it.

Families also have accused the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department and Sheriff John Stone of hiding information and deceiving the public.

Columbine seniors Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold attacked their school with guns and bombs, killing 12 students and a teacher and wounding more than 20 other people before taking their own lives.

Babcock ruled in November, when he threw out the families' claims against school and sheriff's officials, that although mistakes were made at Columbine, they weren't egregious enough to overcome legal bans on suing the government.

On Wednesday, he said that hasn't changed.

"We hope Judge Babcock's ruling puts an end to the unfounded allegations against our law enforcement community," acting Jefferson County Attorney Bill Tuthill said in a statement.

He said Klebold and Harris should bear the blame for the crimes.

"The law does not support continuing efforts to blame the Sheriff's Office in these cases," Tuthill said.

Stuart Stuller, an attorney for Jefferson County Public Schools, said simply, "We're pleased."

*Contact Karen Abbott at (303) 892-5188 or [abbottk@RockyMountainNews.com](mailto:abbottk@RockyMountainNews.com).*

*New staff writer Kevin Vaughan contributed to this report.*

**January 24, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_954564,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_954564,00.html)

### First-hand accounts often vary

#### 25 who saw Columbine tragedy don't agree on what happened

By Kevin Vaughan, News Staff Writer

If the controversy over Daniel Rohrbough's death gets to a courtroom, part of the battle will be fought over the varying recollections of 25 witnesses who were at Columbine High on April 20, 1999.

Their memories, captured in statements taken down in the weeks and months after the school tragedy, are contradictory on some key points. And some that appear to support the contention of Jefferson County authorities -- that killers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold took Rohrbough's life -- may be open for interpretation.

That witnesses who saw the same events have different recollections is no surprise to attorneys and investigators who have worked criminal cases and prosecuted them in court.

"In every critical incident, witness statements are one piece of the puzzle," said Jefferson County Coroner Carl Blesch, who has extensive law enforcement experience. Blesch says he puts witness statements together "with other pieces of evidence and try and get a whole picture."

Those witnesses could be vitally important if any new investigation is launched into the death of Rohrbough, a 15-year-old Columbine student who was shot to death outside the school during the rampage by Harris and Klebold.

The possibility of a new investigation looms after a series of developments in recent weeks.

Rohrbough's parents had filed suit in April 2000, alleging, among other things, that a police officer's bullet killed the boy. After their lawsuit and others were dismissed Nov. 27, they filed new documents in court, naming Dan O'Shea, a Denver police sergeant, as the alleged shooter and accusing Jefferson County authorities of a cover-up.

A federal judge on Wednesday rebuffed the efforts to reinstate those suits.

However, one independent investigation of Rohrbough's death is already under way, and other possibilities exist, including a federal grand jury or a legislative panel.

There is also a possibility that Blesch could convene a coroner's inquest to investigate Rohrbough's death, although last week he decided not to take that step until other options are explored or he is presented with compelling new evidence that shakes the official version of events.

Blesch said his review of 25 witness statements found nothing at odds with the official version of events.

However, Barry Arrington, an attorney who represents the families of Rohrbough and five other Columbine victims, said that he believes physical evidence, or the lack of it, may trump some of the witnesses' recollections.

He pointed to witness statements that appear to support the county's contention that Harris and Klebold killed Rohrbough before any law officers were on scene. In those statements, the witnesses talked about seeing two people shot in the area where Rohrbough was. However, in the official report on Columbine, sheriff's investigators said Rohrbough was shot almost simultaneously with two boys who were seriously injured but

survived, Lance Kirklin and Sean Graves.

"We don't deny that those witness statements say what they say," Arrington said. "But here's the deal: Forensic evidence is always more valuable than witness statements."

The Rohrbough family believes that ballistics evidence and autopsy findings support their version of events.

Bill Tuthill, acting Jefferson County attorney, did not return a message left at his office Wednesday.

Arrington and Rohrbough's father, Brian Rohrbough, also have raised other questions about statements of those witnesses and the work of investigators.

For example, none of the 25 witnesses whose statements were reviewed by Blesch was asked to describe the clothing that was worn by the victims. Some of the witnesses who appear to support the county said they thought the killers, at least initially, were not Harris and Klebold but other students.

"Whenever more than one person sees a traumatic incident you invariably get more than one account, sometimes widely varying versions of what happened," said Denver attorney Scott Robinson. "That's just the nature of human perception."

Denver police Lt. Jon Priest said he could not speak about the Columbine tragedy, but said that, in general terms, witnesses are influenced by many factors. Those could include their race, their upbringing, their experiences, and the level of fear they were experiencing during an event.

"Many times our perceptions are tainted by what we have seen on television, what we have read in books and what we have been told," Priest said. "For example, when you see someone shot with a shotgun in the movies, they are blown backward across the room for about 15 feet.

"The reality is that when someone is shot with a shotgun, they drop to the ground."

*News staff writer Lynn Bartels contributed to this report. Contact Kevin Vaughan at (303) 892-5019 or [vaughank@RockyMountainNews.com](mailto:vaughank@RockyMountainNews.com).*

**January 24, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

## Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/opinion/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_38\\_955825,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/opinion/article/0,1299,DRMN_38_955825,00.html)

### Editorial: Ken Salazar's bright idea

**The Issue:** Judge Lewis Babcock Wednesday stuck with his earlier ruling dismissing the lawsuits filed by families of students killed at Columbine High School. We don't see that he had much choice.

**AG calls for full release of Columbine documents** Even if, as the families believe, there is now evidence bearing on how Daniel Rohrbough died, or more reason to suspect law enforcement agencies are being less than forthcoming about their actions that day, the legal barriers against such lawsuits are virtually insurmountable. We expect that the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals will agree.

**Our view:** So will the lingering questions about what happened at Columbine on April 20, 1999, ever be answered?

**There's no good reason to withhold them now** Perhaps not all of them. As time passes, witnesses' memories of even the most traumatic events are altered by later experience. But a good start, as suggested by state Attorney General Ken Salazar last week in a letter to officials in Jefferson County and elsewhere, is to release all the information they have about the shootings and the subsequent investigation.

"The criminal investigation and prosecutions of the the two killers and their accomplices are over," Salazar said. "There is no viable public interest" in withholding any relevant information.

He specifically mentioned autopsy results. The News has sought, unsuccessfully, release of the autopsy on Dylan Klebold, which was denied by District Judge R. Brooke Jackson on grounds that Klebold's family objected and that the information would be offensive to readers.

Jackson's decision is an instance of the judiciary usurping what should ultimately be a political judgment, made by the legislature when it enacted Colorado's open-records law. Salazar's recommendation, made as it is by an official elected statewide, underscores the point.

What is possible beyond the release of documents? Salazar notes that El Paso County Sheriff John Anderson is currently investigating allegations that Rohrbough was killed by shots fired by a law enforcement officer on the scene. After that investigation is concluded, he says in the letter, Jefferson County Coroner Carl Blesch should consider whether a coroner's inquest would be useful.

We think it would be, but recognize that it would be a relatively narrow inquiry unlikely to address all of the remaining questions about Columbine. And Blesch has already rejected an inquest once.

Another option would be to convene a federal grand jury. But grand jury proceedings are secret, while the primary need is for public disclosure.

Even if all existing documents and evidence are released, as Salazar proposes, there are still people who should be formally questioned, notably Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone.

We continue to believe, therefore, that the best solution is a legislative inquiry, as proposed by Rep. Don Lee, R-Littleton. Such a probe would have subpoena power, which the governor's commission on Columbine did not, and could compel testimony from reluctant witnesses. That would help build confidence that while questions may always remain, at least no answers are being hidden.

January 25, 2002



## Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_956389,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_956389,00.html)

### Release all Columbine material, Salazar says

State attorney general feels that 'enough is enough,' spokesman Ken Lane explains

By Karen Abbott, News Staff Writer

Colorado Attorney General Ken Salazar continues to urge the public release of all Columbine investigative material, including relevant autopsy material, his spokesman said Thursday.

"From Ken's standpoint, enough is enough," spokesman Ken Lane said the day after a federal judge refused to revive civil lawsuits filed by several Columbine families. "That's the point that he reached: 'Come on, folks . . . let's release everything and say this is it, and let the chips fall where they may.'"

Officials repeatedly have said they have released all the information possible about the April 20, 1999, attack.

Repeatedly, more information has come to light.

"Now there is uncertainty because of the dribbling of information," Lane said. "It has not been an orderly process."

In refusing to revive the families' civil lawsuits, Denver U.S. District Judge Lewis Babcock left them pinning their hopes for answers on other options.

Some families have charged official deceit over the deadliest school shootings in U.S. history and have urged grand jury probes, a coroner's inquest and a legislative investigation.

Salazar urged full public disclosure in a letter last week to three Jefferson County officials -- District Attorney Dave Thomas, Sheriff John Stone and Coroner Carl Blesch -- and to El Paso County Sheriff John Anderson.

Anderson, at Stone's request, is investigating allegations that a Denver police officer's "friendly fire" killed one Columbine student, Daniel Rohrbough, and that law officers covered up the truth.

Thomas could ask a grand jury to investigate or request a special prosecutor, but so far he has not done so. He asked Blesch, the coroner, to conduct an inquest, but Blesch has ruled that out for now.

Stone, whose department was in charge of the law enforcement response to the attacks and released an official report based on a lengthy investigation, is the custodian of most of the information about Columbine.

On Thursday, Stone spokeswoman Jacki Tallman said the sheriff opposes releasing everything.

"That is not a very good idea," Tallman said. "There's a lot of information that should not go out, based on potential copycat situations, and certainly things that are very harmful for the families to have out there regarding their children."

Pam Russell, spokeswoman for Thomas, said Thursday his office has deferred to the courts.

"As much disclosure as is possible is certainly in everyone's best interest," Russell said. "As far as blanket release, I'm not certain right now what our position would be on that."

Anderson said his findings will be turned over to Thomas, who will decide whether, or when, they should be made public.

"I do agree with the attorney general that . . . once the investigation has been concluded and presented, that result must be made public," Anderson said.

Lane said Salazar supports the withholding of some especially sensitive information, such as details from autopsy reports that might indicate a slain child had an unrelated medical condition. But those reports should otherwise be made public, he said.

Nearly all the Columbine autopsy reports have been kept secret.

"What Ken is proposing is all voluntary," Lane said. "The Criminal Justice Records Act leaves it within the discretion of the custodian to make that determination."

Blesch wasn't the coroner when his predecessor and other officials decided to keep most of the Columbine autopsy reports secret.

"Before I were to take any position with respect to the autopsies, I would need to speak to the relatives," Blesch said.

Contact Karen Abbott at (303) 892-5188 or [abbottk@RockyMountainNews.com](mailto:abbottk@RockyMountainNews.com).

**January 25, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/news\\_columnists/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_86\\_954179,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/news_columnists/article/0,1299,DRMN_86_954179,00.html)

## Rosen: The fog of war shrouds tragedy



A group of Columbine parents have doggedly pursued Jefferson County authorities, demanding more information for almost three years since that terrible tragedy. They want truth, justice and, perhaps, closure. Those are all understandable and legitimate goals although frustratingly elusive.

The big picture of Columbine has probably been as fully painted as it ever will be. We know who did it: Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. We know why, as much as we can: the two adolescents were angry and deranged. We know how they did it: with premeditation and an arsenal of lethal weapons. We know, underscored by the Erickson Commission report, that law enforcement officials at the scene handled the Klebold and Harris assault on the school poorly. Command, control and communications were confused and misguided. Although courageous individual cops were ready and willing to "engage, contain or capture" the killers, their commanders held them back, foolishly erring on the side of caution while innocent people were being murdered inside. That mistake won't be repeated again. As a result of Columbine, police forces all over the country have rewritten the "book" on how to handle such incidents in the future.

We also know that Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone's investigation was at best sloppy, perhaps incompetent. He was uncooperative, hiding behind an impending lawsuit, in refusing to testify before the commission. And his dealings with the public and the media have been bumbling, especially his cover story, photo and Columbine videotapes debacle with *Time* magazine. The remedy for that is to toss him out of office at the next election.

There was no grand conspiracy by international terrorists. There were no black helicopters. There were no shooters hiding on the grassy knoll. That's the big picture. There's disagreement about the details in the little picture, a dissenting version of which has been constructed by these Columbine parents who continue to pursue a wrongful-death and negligence suit against the Jeffco Sheriff's Office. Among them are the parents of Daniel Rohrbough who believe a Denver cop, not Klebold or Harris, killed their son. They cite missing evidence and conflicting stories given by police officers. They accuse the authorities of a "pattern of obstruction and falsification," in essence a cover-up conspiracy. They're calling for a grand jury or legislative commission to reopen the investigation.

I've read the comprehensive investigative report by Kevin Vaughan and Jeff Kass in the *Rocky Mountain News* analyzing 29 specific claims of Jeffco authorities that the Columbine parents brand as "lies." There are plenty of unanswered questions, contradictions and legitimate concerns. But this is to be expected. Some of the details will never be known, obscured by the fog of war and the clouded and emotionally-charged memories of those immersed in the chaos of that black day and its aftermath. One can sympathize with the anger and frustration of grieving parents, but there really is room for honest disagreement about evidence, interpretation and conclusions. Much of the Jeffco authorities' version of events is supported by the Colorado Bureau of Investigation and the testimony of individual Columbine students, eyewitnesses.

It's understandable that Columbine parents who have lost sons and daughters want someone to blame. Blaming Klebold and Harris is unsatisfying. They're dead and can't be vilified to their faces. So blame has been redirected at the cops and the investigators. The Jeffco Sheriff's Office has been blamed for not stopping Klebold and Harris before the fact. But that's 20/20 hindsight. What happened at Columbine was inconceivable. Police forces are designed to catch criminals after the fact. They're poorly equipped to prevent crimes. Finally, if a Denver cop accidentally killed Rohrbough, as his parents contend, that would surely compound the tragedy. But I greatly doubt that a new investigation will conclusively prove that or much else of substance. It may only prolong the agony.

*Mike Rosen's radio show airs daily from 9 a.m. to noon on 850 KOA.*

**January 25, 2002**

**MORE ROSEN COLUMNS »**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

# Hearing delayed in Columbine case

By [The Denver Post](#)

**Saturday, January 26, 2002 -**

GOLDEN - A court hearing to decide whether materials seized by authorities from the homes of Columbine killers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold should be made public was postponed Friday.

The Denver Post is seeking public release of materials, including journals, audio tapes and videotapes made by the two killers in part to show how the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office used the materials to craft its public report, Post attorney Steven Zansberg said.

Attorneys representing the families of Harris and Klebold, victims' families and the sheriff's office argued against the release. They claimed the materials could incite copycats to carry out similar shootings.

The judge postponed the hearing to allow expert testimony to present opinion on how the public, and potential copycats, may react to the release of the materials. That testimony is expected to be heard no later than mid-March.

[Printable View](#)

[Email a Copy of this Article](#)

[Return to top](#)

## Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_957957,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_957957,00.html)

### Portrait of O'Shea: a cop with conviction

High-octane officer 'comes from heart'

By Jeff Kass, News Staff Writer

Opening scene: A rainbow arches over downtown Denver, framing the city's office buildings.

Cut to night: Gang unit officer Daniel Patrick O'Shea is behind the wheel of his police car, cruising the streets.

"This badge is like an E ticket to Disneyland, and I intend to ride every ride in the park," O'Shea tells the television show *Cops* in the 1992 episode.

"And I really enjoy it when I get to help people."

That soundbite catches the complexity of Sgt. Danny O'Shea -- who won the Police Department's highest award for his efforts at Columbine, but then found himself accused of killing 15-year-old Daniel Rohrbough at the school that day.

O'Shea, 41, is a high-octane cop with a big heart who lives for his work, according to public documents, news stories, and interviews with friends, family and colleagues. He has not previously been at the center of any major public controversy.

His family calls him "Shrek" because they say the bulging muscles on his 6-foot, 1-inch tattooed frame hide a sweet nature, said his wife, Susan O'Shea.

But O'Shea is also known for his rock 'n' roll, gung-ho attitude and a zero tolerance for lawbreakers.

"Dan O'Shea comes from the heart. He's honest and credible, and he tries very hard," said Denver police SWAT Sgt. Anthony Iacovetta, who won the Distinguished Service Cross working with O'Shea, and once supervised him.

"And if something comes across the radio that says 'danger, danger,' he's going to try and be the first one there."

For the past month, O'Shea has been the most talked-about cop in the country, sparking a question that cuts to the heart of policing everywhere: Did his friendly fire kill an innocent?

The pressure of legal and media scrutiny, exacerbated by the trauma of Columbine, is wearing on the officer, says his wife. The Westminster High grad now has thoughts of starting life over and living on a ranch, she said.

"He loved his job once upon a time," said Susan O'Shea, 33.

"But he's been through hell since Columbine."

She said her husband is, however, starting to come around almost a month after he was named in the Columbine lawsuit.

"He had a burglary yesterday and he had a chase, and he liked it."

O'Shea responded to Columbine on April 20, 1999, as a member of Denver SWAT. He fired 51 shots from his 9 mm submachine gun -- more than a third of the shots fired by officers that day.

The Dec. 26 filing by Rohrbough's family that names O'Shea was again dismissed by a federal judge this week, but the family has vowed to appeal. Meantime, the El Paso County sheriff is conducting an independent investigation of Rohrbough's death.

O'Shea says he didn't kill Rohrbough, pointing to news footage that he says proves he fired his weapon only after Rohrbough was dead.

"When the facts of this case come out, you're going to realize I did it right," he told the *News*.

O'Shea isn't sure how he started down the path that led him to Columbine.

"I don't know," the Denver native told *Cops*. "I never thought I'd grow up to be a cop, but I did."

For the past 16 years, O'Shea has found a home in the Denver Police Department, winning departmental awards, impressing bosses and colleagues and spurring some complaints about his aggressive policing.

The only disciplinary record to surface shows that O'Shea appealed a 1991 case for not appearing in court. He later dropped the appeal, citing personal reasons.

The thrice-married O'Shea was awarded joint custody of children Michael, now 11, and Kelsie, now 9, with ex-wife Marnie O'Shea, according to records.

He is characterized as a dedicated father by Susan O'Shea, his friends and his attorney.

The three *Cops* episodes featuring O'Shea from 1992 to 1996 showcase his physical prowess, and his running commentary on the criminal mind, thanks to his psychology degree from the University of Northern Colorado.

O'Shea, bristling with a buzz cut, is a hulk of a cop: The state high school powerlifting champ wears eyeglasses (he dropped out of U.S. Navy officer candidate school because his eyesight wasn't 20/20), and has a way with colorful phrases.

He even had a baby named after him after saving the newborn from a difficult birth: Darohn O'Shea Ransom.

O'Shea applied to the Denver Police Department in 1982, and appears to have been accepted as an applicant. But he instead joined the Lafayette Police Department.

He applied to the Denver police again in 1985, when he was 24.

The application asked about alcohol and narcotics use. "I drink beer," he wrote.

He took the police entrance exam, emerged with the rank of No. 1, and joined the department in 1986.

O'Shea was cited twice in 1990 for the department's second-highest honor, the Medal of Valor. O'Shea worked with one officer to disarm a woman who had an automatic pistol and was threatening to kill herself. He was with another officer when they subdued a man who had a knife and was slashing at officers.

Iacovetta, who was on SWAT with O'Shea, said they won the Distinguished Service Cross in 1997 for trying to remove a man from a hotel room who fired on officers; the man eventually surrendered.

Susan O'Shea says there are many other awards and heroic acts -- including rescuing a man from a burning van.

There are those who have questioned whether his can-do attitude tips him over the line.

The Rev. Leon Kelly, who runs the Open Door Youth Gang Alternative program, recalls disagreements with O'Shea in the 1980s.

Kelly said that the gang members complained that O'Shea would take their belts and burn the kerchiefs that signified gang membership. He left them cuffed and lying on the ground, even when they faced no charges, they said.

"Certainly, I had some concerns back then at some of his tactics," Kelly said.

"We all would hope that we've grown. Certainly, he (O'Shea) has been promoted."

O'Shea's boss, Capt. Mike Battista, said O'Shea asked to supervise the downtown motorcycle unit in large part because of his love for the department issue Harley-Davidsons.

Battista gave O'Shea the job a year ago, and applauds his ability to deal with everyone from business owners to street kids.

"He's kind of a brass tacks kind of guy," Battista said. "What you see with Dan O'Shea is what you get. The people respect him for that."

The mid-level sergeant's position that allows him to stay close to the rhythm of the street is the perfect balance for O'Shea, according to friends and family.

That balance was tossed when his name hit the papers.

"He at first just kind of laughed it off, saying, 'This is crap,' " Susan O'Shea said. "Later that day, he called me up, and it was sinking in. Someone had accused him of murder. He was in shock."

But she said her husband remains proud of his work at the school.

"He wears the Medal of Honor on his shirt every day," she said, "and that's from Columbine."

**January 26, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.

# Did officer or gunmen kill Daniel Rohrbough?

Eyewitnesses say it's 'impossible' cop shot student; parents still unsure

By David Migoys and Kevin Simpson  
Denver Post Staff Writers

[Join the discussions](#)

**Sunday, January 27, 2002** - Denver police Sgt. Dan O'Shea has lived at the center of a month-long controversy that accuses him of gunning down Columbine High School student Daniel Rohrbough.



O'Shea has denied killing the 15-year-old freshman during the April 20, 1999, suicidal attack by teen gunmen Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold that left 12 students and a teacher dead. Rohrbough's family says the evidence points nowhere else.

Over the past month, The Denver Post has reviewed ballistics reports, crime-scene sketches, evidence logs and dozens of witness statements, and reinterviewed many people on the scene - including O'Shea and some students who had never spoken publicly about the shooting.

Among the findings:

- \* Eyewitnesses who knew Rohrbough before the shooting - not from subsequent media reports - insist he went down with the first gunfire from the stairs outside the school cafeteria. The Rohrbough family's lawsuit contends it happened later.

I None of those eyewitnesses put police in the area at the time Rohrbough was shot.

- \* O'Shea describes firing his weapon 60 times, not 51 as ballistics reports claim. He accounts for all of his rounds - including three shots he fired while standing near Rohrbough's body - as protective fire for rescuers well after Rohrbough was killed.

- \* No shell casings from the gunmen were collected near Rohrbough's body. But an unfired 9mm bullet found nearby is consistent with rounds from one of Klebold's guns, raising new questions about Jefferson County's assertion that Klebold shot Rohrbough at close range. Two eyewitnesses say Klebold fumbled with a jammed 9mm weapon.

- \* Eyewitness accounts varied considerably, perhaps reflecting physical trauma or the chaos of the moment. The Post focused on those whose descriptions of the shooting, chronicled in multiple police interviews days or even months apart, remained fairly consistent with their initial recollections. Others appeared to be influenced by details in subsequent media reports.

- \* The 41-year-old O'Shea has pointed to aerial television footage that shows him firing into the school as protection for rescuers. He says the videotape clears him.

- \* Last week, he also told The Post that fears he expressed to a former school administrator about shooting a student were misinterpreted. The comments were presented by Rohrbough's family to link O'Shea to the boy's death and to try to revive a previously dismissed wrongful-death lawsuit. On Wednesday, a judge refused to reinstate the suit, but the family has said it will appeal.

- \* Brian Rohrbough, Daniel's father, says many eyewitness accounts are at odds with the physical evidence, and provide a shaky foundation for Jefferson County's official version that Klebold stood over his injured son and fired two rounds at close range. He also says eyewitnesses might not have recognized O'Shea as a cop because he wasn't in uniform that day.

"If there's physical evidence that matches what (eyewitnesses) are saying, you can help confirm what they're seeing," he said. "If you don't have physical evidence, it becomes more difficult to figure out exactly what happened. In the case of Dan, you have a fair amount of physical evidence, but you're missing some critical pieces."

For instance, investigators never recovered the bullet, or any piece of it, that killed Rohrbough - or even spent shell casings from Klebold's gun anywhere near the boy's body. Nor has Brian Rohrbough heard a satisfactory explanation for the upward trajectory of his son's fatal wound.

Jefferson County officials point to 25 eyewitnesses to support their theory. The Post reviewed those statements and dozens of others, and found many that describe Klebold standing near Rohrbough and firing, but almost all said he fired a shotgun.

Rohrbough wasn't hit by a shotgun blast. But Lance Kirklin, who lay seriously injured near his friend, was struck in the face by point-blank shotgun fire. Another one of Rohrbough's friends, Sean Graves, was wounded and partially paralyzed as he tried to escape.

Graves' account doesn't support the contention that O'Shea killed their son, but he sympathizes with the Rohrbough family and said he's in favor of any attempt to resolve lingering issues.

A federal grand jury or state legislative commission remain as other available investigative options.

"It concerns me that nobody's really on the same page," Graves said. "I'd like to eventually come to an agreement on what happened that day."

Sometime around 11:20 a.m. on April 20, 1999, senior Janine Roberts decided to ditch her "Foods" class with friend Patrice Doyle and head to Roberts' car to retrieve some prom photos. On the way, they passed Rachel Scott and Richard Castaldo eating lunch on a grassy area just off the sidewalk.

Two familiar faces stood at the top of an outdoor stairway that led down toward the cafeteria: Klebold and Harris. The girls smiled and said hello. The boys turned and nodded.

"They had their hands to themselves, in their jackets," Roberts said recently, confirming the account she gave investigators almost three years ago. "When we first walked past, we didn't think anything of it. But now I know what they were doing - preparing."

Dozens of witnesses offered varying - some wildly divergent - accounts of the next several minutes of the attack along the southwest side of the school.

But some consistencies emerged.

Both gunmen fired from the top of the stairs. At some point, Klebold walked down the stairs and fired a point-blank shotgun blast into a wounded student. Students and teachers who witnessed the early moments of the attack don't mention police in general or the physically imposing, flak-jacketed and submachine gun-toting O'Shea in particular.

And many students say they saw Rohrbough hit, although some don't identify him by name until days or weeks later in follow-up interviews.

"One of the hardest problems is how people were questioned," Brian Rohrbough said. "It's difficult to know what they picked up from what they saw and what they got from media accounts. Stuff like that throws into question what you're getting."

"In some cases, they think they're seeing Dan, and in some cases they actually are seeing Dan," he added. "But the overall majority of them, they're seeing a kid get shot, and they're not quite sure who it is."

However, several eyewitnesses - people who actually knew Rohrbough - insist he was shot in the seconds after the shooting began, before police arrived.

Nicholas Buhner was trying to catch up to his friends Rohrbough, Kirklin and Graves as they left the cafeteria, but slowed to buy a soda.

He said seconds later he was headed for the cafeteria door when he saw Rohrbough and Kirklin through a window, "lying on the ground near the bottom of the stairs." Confirming his account to The Post, Buhner said he turned from the window, then saw Graves on the ground outside the cafeteria door.

Graves and Kirklin, both struck by the spray of bullets from the top of the stairs, recounted eating lunch with Rohrbough and, minutes later, seeing him gunned down. Kirklin said he caught Rohrbough as he fell.

Details of their accounts differ, sometimes dramatically. And both boys were seriously injured themselves - Graves remains partially paralyzed, and Kirklin continues to undergo surgery to repair damage from a shotgun blast to the face.

But each places Rohrbough in about the same area at the same time, suffering gunshot wounds. Kirklin couldn't be reached for comment, but Graves offered a measured response to the question of whether a police officer could have shot Rohrbough.

"To the best of my knowledge and from what I saw, no," he said.

Eight days after the shooting, freshman Jayson Autenrieth told investigators he saw Harris shoot Rohrbough and Kirklin in the first moments of the attack. He recognized the victims because Rohrbough had been in his weight-lifting class, and Kirklin "was just a guy that I knew," he confirmed in a recent interview.

Autenrieth, who initially associated the popping noises with a paintball game, said he became convinced the horror was real when he saw Rohrbough "fall hard and stay down," motionless.

"He didn't move, didn't say a word," Autenrieth told The Post. "I knew what happened to him, so there was no way that it could have been a cop."

Anne Marie Hochhalter, who'd been having lunch with Autenrieth and another classmate outside the cafeteria, reported seeing some students struck in the legs before gunfire nearly killed her and left her paralyzed below the waist.

At first, she didn't name victims in a brief hospital interview a week after the attack. But recently, she spoke to The Post to address the possibility that an officer might have shot Rohrbough.

"Impossible," she said, noting she saw no police at the time. "It's impossible."

In the teachers' lounge just off the cafeteria, Amy Burnett, Joyce Jankowski and Christina Redmerski watched the first seconds of the attack through a window. Only Burnett, across the room at a copy machine, identified Rohrbough by name in her statement to police a month after the shooting. She told them she saw the boy running outside and that he appeared to be shot.

In front of the window, however, Redmerski and Jankowski said they saw two boys lying on the ground. Redmerski then accounted for a third when she went outside to tell students to quit what she initially thought was horseplay. She saw an injured Graves at the cafeteria door.

From outside that same door, student Mark Christner said he saw Rohrbough fall, then two others. Classmate William Beck also saw the three boys go down. He also said he recognized someone else on the stairs: Mark Opfer.

Opfer just happened to find himself walking next to Rohrbough, whom he knew from a weight-lifting class, as he headed up the steps toward the west entrance. When one of the gunmen fired, Opfer said, he turned toward Rohrbough, who looked at him strangely and fell backward, screaming.

Some details became sketchy in his hurry to escape, Opfer said. But he insists his friend was one of the first shot.

"One hundred percent positive," Opfer said recently.

The theory of events presented in the Rohrbough lawsuit also relies partially on a compelling witness.

Arapahoe County sheriff's Deputy Jim Taylor told Rohrbough's mother, Sue Petrone, that he saw Daniel run down the hill with a group of students and drop to the ground after being shot. In a conversation Sue Petrone recorded, Taylor said he glimpsed a Denver police officer and heard machine-gun fire.

Earlier this month, Arapahoe County Sheriff Pat Sullivan said Taylor wasn't ever in a position to see or hear anything at the school and fired him.

Contacted by The Post, Taylor declined to comment.

Brian Rohrbough said the look in Taylor's eyes as he described the boy's death convinced him it was true.

"I've run into a lot of people who've lied to me," he said. "If (Taylor) was doing it, he's better than anyone I've run into."

The family also points to a statement from Jefferson County Deputy Annette Walker, who allegedly told Sue Petrone she saw Rohrbough holding open a door so other students could escape. Walker, through a sheriff's department spokeswoman, denied making the comment.

The Rohrbough lawsuit also relies on a statement from Celine Marquez, a former Jefferson County school administrator who happened to meet O'Shea on April 22, 1999. She said O'Shea broke down in tears and said he hadn't slept for two days because he feared he may have shot a student. She said he also expressed relief that ballistics tests showed none of the kids had been hit by police bullets.

O'Shea recently told The Post that what he really feared was that any one of the rounds he fired into the school that day might have struck someone. He said he was relieved to hear ballistics information that students shot in the library - where he fired many of his rounds - were instead shot at close range.

Dan O'Shea said he was running late on the morning of April 20, 1999 - oversleeping after his

night shift - when he should have been on his way to pick up his daughter from preschool. He said his clock showed 11:37 a.m. when he left his house not far from Columbine.

On his way to the nearby preschool, he heard urgent radio traffic from Denver Division Chief Gerry Whitman: Shots fired at Columbine High School.

That was after Jefferson County sheriff's Deputy Neil Gardner, on assignment as the safety officer at Columbine, had radioed for help from the school's southwest parking lot. Gardner, who said he had already exchanged gunfire with Eric Harris, reported seeing only a girl - Anne Marie Hochhalter - on the ground when he arrived.

Deputies Scott Taborsky, who was in a car, and Paul Smoker, who was on his motorcycle, were first to arrive. They stopped by a shack that was providing cover to several injured students just west of the stairs and tried to help them, several witnesses said.

Meanwhile, O'Shea veered his car from Wadsworth Boulevard and Bellevue Avenue and headed toward the school. He said he pulled into a parking lot on the school's east side to ask a paramedic what was happening.

"That's when I heard the shots from the other side," O'Shea said.

According to several witnesses, Taborsky drove his police car slowly as Smoker walked behind it toward Mark Taylor, a wounded student lying on the grassy hillside between the shack and the stairs.

Taborsky reported gunfire from the school, apparently aimed at other Denver officers who arrived just ahead of O'Shea. One of them, officer Binh Tran, yelled into his radio that officers were under fire.

Hearing Tran's radio call for help, O'Shea drove his car toward the school's north side with three other Denver police officers who joined him: Tom O'Neill, Henry Bloodworth and Henry Depew.

O'Shea, wearing just a T-shirt and jeans, said he stopped his car near the school's baseball-field fence, ran to his trunk to grab his police SWAT gear - including his H&K MP-5 submachine gun - and hustled toward the action, leaving the trunk open.

Almost immediately, O'Neill and Bloodworth saw a gun muzzle appear from behind an opened exit door on the school's west side. The two fired several rounds at the door, according to their statements and crime-scene forensics.

Deputies Gardner and Smoker also fired shots, each seeing the unidentified gunman at the school door. They were unaware, however, that Denver police also were firing at the doors, according to their statements.

Moments later, Smoker and Denver officer Greg Romero, who was in the parking lot, moved forward to help two ambulances that stopped by the cafeteria doors to rescue wounded students Kirklin and Graves.

It was about 12:02 p.m., records show.

Suddenly, reports and witnesses say, gunfire erupted from the library windows above the ambulance workers. That's when O'Shea fired for the first time.

FBI crime-scene drawings show three of O'Shea's shell casings on the grassy hill. O'Shea told The Post that he fired 21 shots into the library from that location, bringing his total count to 60 shots instead of the 51 recorded by the FBI.

It's unknown what happened to the other nine shell casings.

Later, O'Shea fired several rounds into the school's west doors as rescuers retrieved students Rachel Scott and Richard Castaldo. Then a team of four officers headed down the hill, edging along the school wall, on their way to check a boy lying at the bottom of the stairs.

O'Shea said the three shell casings from his gun found near Rohrbough's body landed there as he provided protective gunfire for two other officers who checked to see if Rohrbough was alive.

"My biggest guilt complex was that I overslept that day," O'Shea said, "not that I shot someone."

For all the certainty of some eyewitnesses, forensics still cloud Jefferson County's assertion that Klebold hit Rohrbough with two close-range shots, including the fatal round, from his 9mm weapon.

"The biggest thing is, we know that what they told us happened, couldn't have," Brian Rohrbough said. "Everything else is not going to be known until people are placed under oath and their actions and statements are verified."

And while no one disputes that Klebold stood over Kirklin and fired his shotgun, Rohrbough points to the absence of any Klebold or Harris 9mm shell casings around his son's body - and the presence of casings from O'Shea's 9mm weapon - as evidence that the cop shot him.

"Is my case circumstantial? Yes," Rohrbough said. "It's based on physical evidence, it's based on statements attributed to O'Shea, and it's based on an overall view of what we know. And part of the circumstances is there's absolutely no evidence that Klebold or Harris killed Danny."

However, an unfired 9mm shell was found on the sidewalk near Rohrbough's feet, according to FBI crime-scene sketches. That shell, according to evidence records, was of the same make and type as Klebold's ammunition. It's unclear why Colorado Bureau of Investigation forensic experts didn't test the unfired round.

Is that unspent bullet significant?

From his vantage point outside the cafeteria, student James Stewart noticed one of the gunmen - presumably Klebold - having problems with his weapon as he descended the stairs. Klebold "appeared to be looking at the gun . . . appeared to be attempting to move a lever," Stewart said.

Classmate William Arapkiles told a similar story, describing a gun like the TEC-DC9 that Klebold was firing. He said that Klebold might have intended to shoot Rohrbough at close range, but couldn't because of a faulty weapon.

"Maybe somebody else saw him try to fire the gun, but it never went off," Arapkiles told The Post. "People thought it looked like it did."

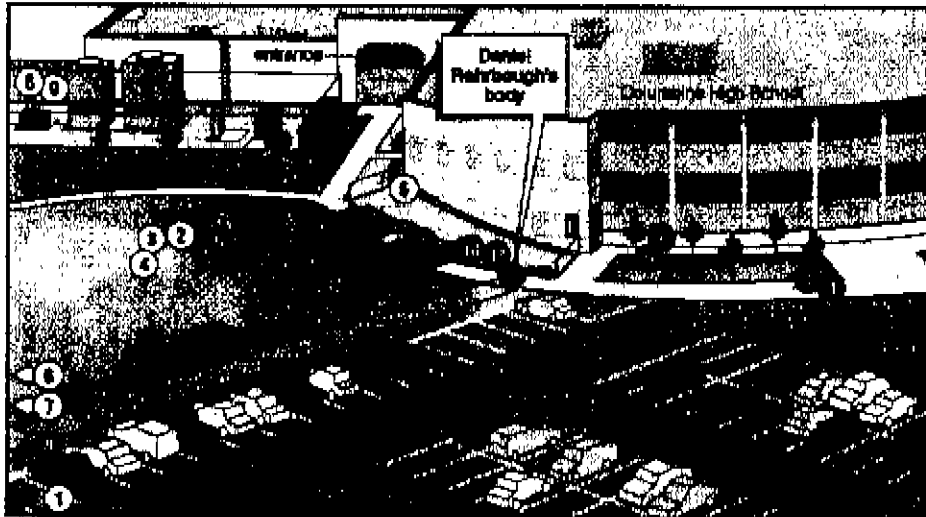
Whatever value ascribed to eyewitness accounts, they fall short of answering precisely how Daniel Rohrbough died. And Brian Rohrbough continues his search for the missing pieces.

"This is more complex than pointing out, 'Gee, this eyewitness thinks they saw that, so who cares

If there's no Klebold or Harris bullets or shells, it still had to be them,' " Rohrbough said. "Well, I care. There's enough information available to tell this story, but the police will not release it."

## Where they were

Dozens of witnesses watched Daniel Reinbaugh fall as gunmen Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold opened fire at Columbine High School. Later, several police officers and sheriff's deputies converged on the school and exchanged gunfire with the shooters or helped retrieve the dead and wounded.



- WITNESSES**
- |                         |                    |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 1 Mark Opler            | 6 Janine Roberts   |
| 2 Mark Christner        | 7 William Asplides |
| 3 Anne Marie Hochhalter | 8 Denny Rowe       |
| 4 Jayson Auerbach       | 9 Lance Kridin     |
| 5 William Beck          | 10 Sean Graves     |
| 6 Nicholas Bahrer       |                    |

Source: Denver Post research

- LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS**
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 Jefferson County sheriff's Deputy Neil Gardner   | 6 Denver police officer Binh Tran        |
| 2 Jefferson County sheriff's Deputy Scott Taborsky | 7 Denver police Sgt. Mark Drejam         |
| 3 Jefferson County sheriff's Deputy Paul Brubaker  | 8 Denver police officer Tom O'Neill      |
| 4 Denver Police Sgt. Dan O'Brien                   | 9 Denver police officer Henry Bloodworth |
| 5 Denver police officer Gregory Romero             |  |

The Denver Post

[Printable View](#)

[Email a Copy of this Article](#)

[Return to top](#)

# Expert: O'Shea's bullets unique

By David Migoya and Kevin Simpson  
Denver Post Staff Writers

[Join the discussions](#)

**Sunday, January 27, 2002** - Item number 260; Identification number 8757.

Those are the official labels for a piece of Columbine High shooting evidence that's about the size of a Pez candy.

It's the bullet taken from the body of Daniel Rohrbough, the only bullet recovered of the three that struck him. The 9mm copper-jacketed round tore through his midsection at an upward angle, but it didn't kill him.

That much is given.

Where the bullet came from remains debatable.

A forensic firearms expert contacted by The Denver Post, however, said it shouldn't be hard to determine whether Item 260 was fired by Denver police Sgt. Dan O'Shea, who was accused by Rohrbough's family in a wrongful-death lawsuit of killing the student. The suit was dismissed in November, and a judge last week refused to reinstate it. The family has vowed to appeal.

O'Shea was using very specific, unique ammunition that's easily distinguished from all others, said Allan Jones of CCI-Speer, the company that made the bullets O'Shea fired at Columbine High School.

Rohrbough's family claims O'Shea fired the fatal shot, but is unsure whether the same gunman fired all three.

Forensic scientists with the Colorado Bureau of Investigation say the bullet, which a pathologist described as "well-preserved," likely came from the 9mm Hi-Point carbine Eric Harris was firing. One indicator was that marks on the slug were "consistent with test bullets (experts later) fired from" Harris' gun.

If O'Shea had shot Rohrbough, the 9mm ammunition he used that day - Speer "+P" Gold Dot Hollow Point - should have stood out to whoever examined the slug.

The FBI identified 51 Speer +P Gold Dot shells at Columbine that came from O'Shea's gun.

The construction and design of the Gold Dot bullet is so unusual that Speer patented the process decades ago. No other bullet is made the same way, Jones said.

"The jacket (around the lead slug) is pure copper," Jones said of the Gold Dot bullets. "That's because it's chemically bonded. All other bullets on the market, including some of the other types we make, are an alloy of copper and zinc. It's really a simple test that can determine that."

The CBI hasn't said much about Item 260. In fact, it won't say what tests it did on the bullet. Deputy Director Pete Mang declined to comment.

Ballistics and autopsy reports also do not say if the slug taken from Rohrbough was a hollow point - the type O'Shea was using - if it was still rounded at the tip or if it had mushroomed, as hollow points are designed to do.

Additionally, the Gold Dot bullet is specifically identifiable by the unique concave "shallow-dish" shape at the bottom of the slug, Jones said.

The company sells the Gold Dot hollow-point bullet only to law enforcement. The bullet has a nickel-plated casing and is stamped "Speer" on the base of the shell. The commercially available Gold Dot bullet is fitted into a brass casing and is stamped "CCI."

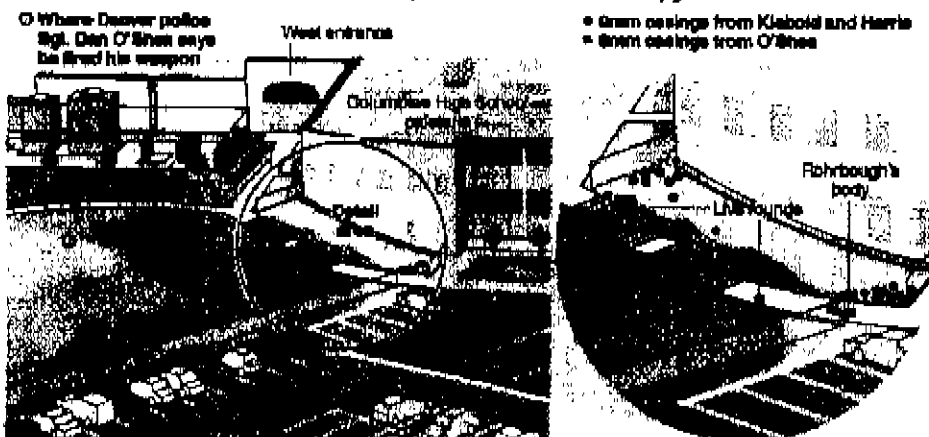
FBI evidence records show no CCI shell casings were found outside the school.

## Physical evidence in Daniel Rohrbough's death

The parents of slain Columbine High School student Daniel Rohrbough have claimed their son was fatally shot by Denver police Sgt. Dan O'Shea. Rohrbough's autopsy concluded that he was killed by a 9mm bullet. Three police officers as well as Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris were using 9mm-caliber weapons April 20, 1999.

### The scene where Rohrbough was killed

Witnesses placed Harris and Klebold at the top of the stairs outside the west entrance to Columbine High School. Their first gunshots, fired toward the west doors, killed Rachel Scott and injured Richard Castaldo. Rohrbough, Allen Givewe and Lance Kiriin exited a cafeteria side door on their way to Olmsted Park and were hit by gunfire.



### Who was shooting 9mm firearms

Rohrbough was killed by a bullet from a 9mm weapon. Three police officers, along with Harris and Klebold, had 9mm firearms.

#### LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS



Harris

Denver police  
Sgt. Dan O'Shea

Gun used

Heckler & Koch  
MP-5 9mm



Denver police  
officer George Gray

Heckler & Koch  
MP-5 9mm



Jefferson  
County Sheriff  
Deputy Paul Strickler

Glock Model 17  
semi-automatic  
pistol

#### ATTACKERS



Dylan Klebold

Kahr-Tao Model  
750-DCB  
semi-automatic  
pistol



Eric Harris

H&P  
Model 900  
pistol

#### How the bullets fired

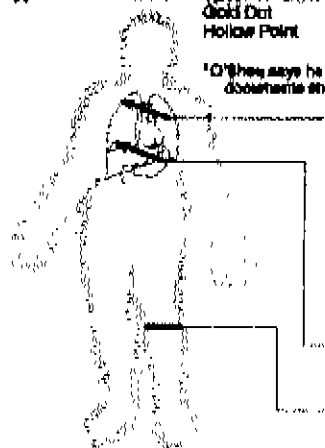
Type of ammunition

31  
Ruger HP 9mm  
Gold Dot  
Hollow Point

37  
S&W HP 9mm  
Gold Dot  
Hollow Point

5  
S&W 9mm  
Luger

O'Shea says he fired 80, but  
documents show he fired 51.



### Rohrbough's autopsy

Daniel Rohrbough was hit with three bullets.

Wound 1: Bullet entered left chest, went through left lung, heart, aorta, esophagus, right lung and exited through the upper back. This was the shot that killed Rohrbough. The bullet was not recovered.

Wound 2: Bullet entered left abdomen, passed through stomach, left lobe of liver and came to rest in the space below the right lung. This bullet was retrieved during the autopsy.

Wound 3: Bullet passed through the left leg just below the knee. The bullet was not recovered.

### Why the retrieved bullet is important

One bullet, retrieved from Rohrbough's body, was described in the autopsy report as a "copper-jacketed, large-caliber bullet which is well preserved, and measures 4 1/2" in length and 9/16" in diameter." Ballistic reports show markings on the slug were consistent with bullets test-fired from Eric Harris' gun. In addition, the reports show the markings don't match those left by other guns they examined, including police weapons. No other information about the bullet, such as whether it mushroomed, is in the report. But other experts said there are separate tests that could definitively determine whether the bullet matches ammunition Denver police Sgt. Dan O'Shea was using.

1 Typically, when a gun is fired, a firing pin is driven into the primer at the back of the cartridge, leaving marks

Firing pin mark

2 The empty casing can pick up distinctive marks, scratches and other marks when it is ejected out of the gun

3 Lands, which are ridges cut into the barrel of a gun, make the bullet spin and achieve an accurate trajectory. The lands, unique to every gun, leave marks on the bullet.

[Printable View](#)

[Email a Copy of this Article](#)

[Return to top](#)

## Columbine families to visit Capitol today

## KIn to press request for legislative probe

**By Howard Pankratz**  
**Denver Post Legal Affairs Writer**

**Wednesday, January 30, 2002** - Columbine families will go to the state Capitol today to ask for a legislative probe of the Columbine massacre, a week after a judge refused to reinstate their negligence and wrongful-death lawsuits against Jefferson County authorities.

Barry Arrington, a former state legislator who represents some of the families, said many parents feel that a legislative commission is the "last best hope" for an unbiased and comprehensive investigation of the events before, during and after April 20, 1999.

The families will hold a news conference on the steps of the Capitol.

Arrington said he doesn't expect Jefferson County District Attorney Dave Thomas or U.S. Attorney John Suthers to convene the grand juries that the parents want.

Arrington said he has no faith that an investigation by the El Paso County Sheriff's Office will uncover who shot Columbine student Daniel Rohrbough - the police or killers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. Arrington represents Brian Rohrbough and Sue Petrone, Daniel's parents.

Arrington said he believes the investigation by El Paso County Sheriff John Anderson, who was asked by Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone to undertake the investigation, will find that Stone's earlier investigation "is perfect in every detail and that these parents are all wet."

Arrington said he has become skeptical of the Anderson investigation, in part because investigators have not contacted Brian Rohrbough.

"Anderson's investigation is worse than useless," said Arrington, noting that the El Paso authorities don't have subpoena power. "I feel the Anderson investigation is a distraction."

But Lt. Melissa Hartman, a spokeswoman for Anderson, said the fact that no contact has been made with Rohrbough should not discourage the Rohrbough family.

She said that the El Paso investigation is only a month old and that even though it is focusing solely on the circumstances of Daniel Rohrbough's death, investigators still have "an extreme amount of information" to review. She said the investigation will not be completed for at least "another month or two."

"If our Investigators feel Mr. Rohrbough is going to contribute relevant information, they certainly will contact him," Hartman said.

Jeff Dorschner, a spokesman for Suthers, said the U.S. attorney has made no decision on whether to convene a grand jury. Pam Russell, spokesman for Thomas, said no decision will be made about a grand jury before Thomas receives Anderson's report.

Russell said Thomas "Intends to be open as possible" with the Anderson report, making what he can public. Thomas had recommended a coroner's Inquest as a way to investigate Daniel Rohrbough's death because it is open to the public. In contrast, grand juries are conducted in secrecy, although grand jurors can issue a report if there is no indictment.

**sections**  
metro | obits  
business  
life | go!  
sports | weather

**online features**  
ap wire | msnbc  
cinema guide  
gazette services  
quick facts

**market place**  
classified  
careers | coupons  
real estate | auto  
print ads online

**Subscribe Today!**



January 31, 2002

## 'We have to seek the truth'

### Parents of victims demand legislative probe into Columbine

By Barry Bortnick The Gazette

DENVER - Twenty-five family members of children killed or wounded at Columbine High School stood outside the Capitol on Wednesday and called upon Gov. Bill Owens and Colorado lawmakers to start a legislative probe into the massacre.

Wednesday's rally was the latest move by Columbine survivors to seek information about unanswered questions into the April 30, 1999, assault carried out by Columbine students Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold.

The parents want a legislative committee, backed by subpoena power, to initiate a new review of the case.

State Rep. Don Lee, R-Littleton, has expressed interest in such a probe. As yet, Lee has taken no official steps inside the Legislature to create such a committee.

Sue Petrone, the mother of Columbine victim Danny Rohrbough, met with Lee before the rally. She said the lawmaker was confident the Legislature would initiate some action.

Lee could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Several other Columbine parents voiced support for such an investigation.

"I don't have any illusions that if the truth came out that my daughter would walk back into the room," said Dawn Anna, whose daughter, Lauren Townsend, died inside the Columbine library. "We have to seek the truth or wait for the next tragedy."

The families expressed little hope a review by the El Paso County Sheriff's Office into the death of Rohrbough will satisfy anyone's search for the truth.

"We've run up against a great blue wall," Petrone said, referring to the lack of cooperation the families say they have received from various law enforcement agencies.

Accusations raised in recently filed U.S. District Court documents allege Denver Police Sgt. Daniel O'Shea fatally shot Rohrbough. O'Shea has denied the claim. Jefferson County sheriff's investigators, who oversaw the initial Columbine investigation, asked El Paso County to review Rohrbough's death.

On

**Health & Beauty**  
HEALTH & BEAUTY  
CENTER

**Create Custom Applications and Web**

**100%**

**100%**

But the Columbine families insist the state needs to take a fresh look at every aspect of the crime.

"We have a lot more questions than how Danny (Rohrbough) died," said Joe Kechter, whose son Matt died at Columbine. "We all have questions to answer.

"We need to know (what happened) before, during and after."

Bruce Beck, Lauren Townsend's stepfather, said a legislative investigation might explain why students were told to hide in the library and wait for help.

"I want to know why it took four hours for help to come to the library," Beck said, referring to the room where several students were killed.

Copyright 2002, The Gazette, a Freedom Communications, Inc. Company. All rights reserved. Contact

US.

# Columbine parent spurs retest of bullet's origin

By Howard Pankratz  
Denver Post Legal Affairs Writer

Thursday, January 31, 2002 -



Post / Craig F. Walker

Dawn Anna, left, mother of Columbine victim Lauren Townsend, Betty Shoels, aunt of victim Isaiah Shoels, and Phyllis Velasquez, mother of victim Kyle Velasquez, stand outside the Capitol.

## Columbine parent spurs retest of bullet's origin

By Howard Pankratz  
Denver Post Legal Affairs Writer

Authorities will retest a bullet that passed through the arm of a slain Columbine student after the boy's mother questioned Wednesday whether police or a teen gunman fired the shot.

Patricia DePooter, speaking at a state Capitol news conference, said she hopes a legislative commission can tell her why officials only compared the bullet - which traveled through son Corey's arm and ended up in his backpack - with law-enforcement weapons and not the guns of killers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold.

"There are a lot of questions that aren't answered that even families you don't hear about, like the DePooters, want answered," DePooter said.

DePooter's questions follow months of scrutiny over whether a Denver SWAT officer shot and killed another student, 15-year-old Daniel Rohrbough.

Jefferson County sheriff's spokeswoman Jacki Tallman said late Wednesday the Colorado Bureau of Investigation determined in 1999 that the bullet fired through Corey DePooter's arm was not from a law officer.

But because of Patricia DePooter's comments at the news conference, the bullet will be retested to specifically determine whether Harris or Klebold fired it, Tallman said.

Jefferson County authorities have said - and thousands of pages of investigative documents and ballistics reports indicate - that none of the roughly 150 bullets fired by police on April 20, 1999, hit any students.

But in papers filed in federal court last month, Rohrbough's family accused Denver Sgt. Dan O'Shea of shooting their son. O'Shea and officials have denied the accusation.

Rohrbough was struck by three bullets. Only one was recovered.

Kate Battan, Jefferson County's lead Columbine investigator, said Wednesday that renewed testing on that one bullet also is a possibility as part of an El Paso County Sheriff's Department investigation into who shot Rohrbough. That probe was requested by Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone.

"If (El Paso County investigators) choose to send it back to the CBI or send it to an independent lab, then they certainly have that option," Battan said. "All they have to do is call me and say, 'Release it to me,' and I'll release it to them."

Wrongful-death and negligence lawsuits filed by the families of Columbine victims against Jefferson County sheriff's and school officials were dismissed in November, and a federal court judge refused to reinstate them last week. Appeals are expected.

The suits accused authorities of missing warning signs that might have prevented the worst school shooting in U.S. history and being too slow to go into the school once the gunfire started. Harris and Klebold killed 12 students and a teacher before taking their own lives.

On Wednesday, DePooter and several other families called on legislators to convene an investigative panel to get to the truth.

"I have had people ask me, 'Why can't you just get over this?' But it doesn't have to do with getting over it," said Dawn Anna, whose daughter, Lauren Townsend, was among those who died.

"It has to do with finding out why my daughter, these children, (teacher) Dave Sanders, entered Columbine High School on April 20 and did not come out alive," Anna said. "We are seeking the truth."

Before the news conference, several families met with Rep. Don Lee, R-Littleton, who likely would head a legislative commission.

Phyllis and Al Velasquez said they also question the official version of what happened to their son Kyle in the school library.

Investigators "initially told us that Kyle was sitting at the computer desk and didn't have a clue what was going on and was killed," said Al Velasquez. "We later found out that was ridiculous. There were alarms going off, smoke, 911 calls, and he was aware what was happening. He was found underneath the desk."

[Printable View](#)

[Email a Copy of this Article](#)

[Return to top](#)

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: [http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN\\_106\\_964528,00.html](http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/columbine/article/0,1299,DRMN_106_964528,00.html)

### Families, lawmakers urge Columbine Inquiry

By Michele Ames, News Staff Writer

Seven of the 12 twelve families whose children where slain during the Columbine High School shootings came to the state Capitol steps Wednesday to urge lawmakers and Gov. Bill Owens to investigate the tragedy.

The parents and other family members threw their support behind a plan by Rep. Don Lee, R-Littleton, to form a legislative committee that would have subpoena power, something no other outside investigators have had.

The parents rattled off a list of people they would like to see appear for questioning, including Jefferson County Sheriff John Stone and the parents of the two killers, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. They also have a laundry list of questions.

"These families have never sought anything but the truth," said Dawn Anna, mother of slain student Lauren Townsend. "This goes beyond our children. It reaches your children. To do nothing is to wait for another tragedy."

Their urging was met with strong support from a few legislative leaders, tentative support from others and silence from the governor's office.

"The governor has not yet taken a position on a legislative investigation," said Dan Hopkins, Owens' press secretary.

Some lawmakers, including House Speaker Doug Dean, R-Colorado Springs, have embraced the idea.

"These parents deserve the truth. They've looked for it and they're not finding it. They deserve to have their elected officials take action," Dean said.

Dean has been working with Lee to find the roughly \$300,000 lawmakers estimate they would need for such things as hiring attorneys and investigators.

Dean said he's even searched for lawyers willing to donate their time.

It's the money involved that is causing some lawmakers concern about forming the committee, which would have less than 10 members.

"If we're going to spend taxpayers' money, then they need to find in our budget where the dollars are," said Senate President Stan Matsunaka, D-Loveland. "We're already trying to cut \$190 million from the state budget."

While the parents urged quick action, any investigation is unlikely to start until spring. Lee said he won't push his bill until El Paso County Sheriff John Anderson finishes his inquiry into whether student Daniel Rohrbough could have been accidentally killed by a police officer.

That report is expected in late March or early April.

"As sensitive as this issue is, I'm going to make sure we cover all bases before we move forward," Lee said.

The parents who lost children are unlikely to wait quietly.

"It isn't like we haven't gotten on with our lives -- we've all moved forward," said Sue Petrone, Rohrbough's mother. "But we deserve some answers. Danny is worth this much. All the children and (slain teacher) Dave Sanders are worth this much."

**January 31, 2002**

Copyright 2002, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.