



With Justice For All

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Robert Lawlor Exonerated: Found Not Guilty of All Charges

The Law Enforcement Legal Defense Fund (LELDF) has won a major court case. At the end of a four-week trial, **Robert Lawlor**, formerly a sergeant of the Hartford, Connecticut, Police Department, was found **not guilty** of all charges.

For four years, Robert Lawlor had been embroiled in legal battles to contest a grand jury indictment on charges of manslaughter and assault for a 2005 episode involving the death of a dangerous suspect. He had been suspended from the police force without pay, pending the outcome of the legal battles.

The incident leading to the charges occurred in a dangerous neighborhood of Hartford where Sgt. Lawlor had previously been stabbed, shot twice, and threatened with deadly force. On the evening of May 7, 2005, he and an Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms special agent, Daniel Prather, attempted to question two suspects who were armed and in a car being sought as part of an investigation of a drive-by shooting and murder. A few moments before, Sgt. Lawlor observed suspect Jashon Bryant operating a semi-automatic pistol just outside the stolen vehicle. The officers got in front of the vehicle and shouted loudly "Police officers. Cut off the ignition and put your hands on the dashboard."

The suspects did not comply with the officers' orders. Instead, the second suspect, Brandon Henry, reached to the floor on the passenger side, — leading Lawlor to believe he was retrieving the pistol — and started accelerating the vehicle in what appeared to be an attempt to run over Special Agent Prather. Lawlor believed that not only was his partner



*Sgt. Lawlor with his wife, Stephanie,
and their six daughters*

in imminent danger of being run over, but also that Bryant was about to shoot the weapon he had seen just a few minutes earlier. To save the life of his partner, Sgt. Lawlor fired at the car, fatally wounding Bryant.

The Hartford Police Department concluded he was justified in firing his weapon. However, State's Attorney John Connelly charged him with manslaughter, which carries a possible 20-year sentence. The Connecticut Supreme Court

recently ruled in Mr. Lawlor's favor, paving the way for the not-guilty verdict.

LELDF was actively involved in the legal "discovery" process to bring important information to the grand jury that had been excluded from consideration. In addition, LELDF assisted Mr. Lawlor's attorneys in demonstrating that some of the evidence presented was biased, which greatly assisted the jury in determining his innocence.

Robert Lawlor is very grateful for the generous supporters of LELDF who made this victory possible. His attorney, Mike Georgetti, and wife, Stephanie Lawlor, both said that LELDF's consistent support sustained the case and led to the ultimate triumph. Now that he is free of this heavy burden, we hope that his life will quickly return to normal.

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All Charges Dismissed Against New Mexico Officers

In addition to a long-fought victory in Robert Lawlor's case (see page one), LELDF has won an additional case — that of three officers of the Raton (New Mexico) Police Department who were charged with involuntary manslaughter in the death of a suspect who died of a cocaine overdose during his arrest. Attorney General Gary King announced in December that all charges have been dismissed against **Sgt. Chris Edmondson** and **Officers Nolberto Dominguez** and **Leonard Baca** in the death of Jesse Saenz. Dr. Ian Paul, the medical examiner, confirmed that Saenz died of "exited delirium," a form of cocaine intoxication. In his report, Dr. Paul stated that neither the use of tasers nor restraint of the suspect contributed to his death. The policemen had been facing a possible sentence of from 18 months to two years.

The officers had received some negative media coverage, and family members and friends of Saenz staged an anti-police demonstration outside the courtroom while the grand jury was deliberating.

The episode leading to the charge started at 4:15 a.m. on November 18, 2007, when the three policemen tried to restrain Saenz, who was "wildly out-of-control." Eye-witnesses reported that the man was hurling a chain link fence at cars in a driveway. He was screaming at the top of his lungs while intermittently walking on all fours and pulling up large chunks of the lawn and throwing them at the passersby.

Attempts to handcuff him were fruitless. The policemen used their taser guns, which had no effect and appeared to be malfunctioning. In order to restrain him in the police cruiser, Officer Dominguez, upon instruction from Sgt. Edmondson, sat on him for the short ride to the police station. Saenz was so violent, even under restraint, that he injured Officer Dominguez' wrist and broke his wristwatch. Suddenly, moments before their arrival at the jail, Saenz stopped struggling and went limp. The officers initially thought he had passed out, but then they realized that he was not breathing. Officers Baca and Dominguez administered CPR as they waited for the ambulance to arrive. The emergency medical team members continued all appropriate life-support methods as they transported Saenz to the hospital, but he was dead on arrival.

The autopsy report and pathology reports stated that Saenz died from "excited delirium" because of the high levels of four drugs: cocaine, nemozolecgonine, cocaethylene, and hydroxzone. But the report also blamed "the means of restraint" as a contributing factor.

Initially, key evidence was not disclosed to the grand jury, and no interviews were conducted with the emergency medical team or emergency room personnel; nor were Saenz's past medical records released. The forensic pathologist did not question any of the officers.

All of these questions were resolved when Dr. Ian Paul categorically stated that the cause of death was from an overdose of the four illegal drugs and that neither the tasing nor restraint contributed to Saenz' death.

The three policemen had been on paid administrative leave for a year, pending the outcome of the case.

The officers and their families, particularly Rhonda Edmondson, wife of Sgt. Edmondson, are very grateful to the donors to LELDF who responded to our urgent requests for funds to help with this legal battle.



Sgt. Chris Edmondson, 39, a 17-year veteran of the Raton Police Department, has received numerous awards and recognitions including a Gallantry Star, a Meritorious Service Medal, a Lifesaver Award, a Drug Buster Medal, an Honorable Service Medal, an Officer-of-the-Month Award numerous times, a Unit Citation, and a Team (ERT) medal, among others. He assisted in the capture of one of America's Most Wanted criminals, Justin Weinberger, in 2001.



Officer Leonard Baca, 32, is a 12-year veteran of the Raton Police Department. He has a degree in criminal justice from Western International University. He was awarded two unit citations for team effort under combat conditions, two honorable service awards from the Raton Police Department, and four Drug Buster awards.



Officer Nolberto Dominguez, 31, has a Bachelor's in Business Administration from the University of Phoenix. He has been with the Raton Police Department for three years and has received a Drug Buster award.



founded 1994

With Justice for All is published by the Law Enforcement Legal Defense Fund (LELDF), a non-profit, tax-exempt organization pursuant to Section 501 (c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. LELDF provides legal assistance in court challenges to legitimate law enforcement activity throughout the country. If you know of policemen who may need assistance, please send specific information to LELDF, 1611 N. Kent Street, Suite 901, Arlington, VA 22209 or to lelfd@cox.net.

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CASE UPDATES

Torrey Thompson of Georgia



Torrey Thompson, former officer in the DeKalb County (Georgia) Police Department, faces an uphill battle to fight charges of felony murder, manslaughter, aggravated assault, and violation of an oath by an officer following the fatal shooting of Lorenzo Matthews in 2006. Officer Thompson shot Matthews, who was fleeing from arrest for a hit-and-run incident with a stolen vehicle. Thompson, with two other officers, ordered Matthews to stop and show his hands. Instead, the

suspect pointed a black object at them. Assuming the object to be a gun, Thompson, a 33-year-old former Marine sergeant, fired at Matthews, who kept running but died later of gunshot wounds. The actions by Thompson and his fellow officers were considered justified at the time of the incident. However, two years later a grand jury scrutinizing the DeKalb Police Department singled out this episode for further investigation.

LELDF has been assisting Thompson's attorney, Bill Atkins, with a strategy that will allow Torrey to take the witness stand to tell the complete story of what occurred. In a series of pretrial motions, Mr. Atkins moved to suppress earlier statements made by Torrey during the initial investigation. While everything he said during the previous inquiry was truthful, some important details were left out. Fortunately, the trial judge ruled in our favor despite vehement opposition by the prosecutor, and Torrey will be free to take the stand and not be cross-examined on his earlier statements. His complete account on the witness stand will be powerful and, God willing, will help to clarify the details of the incident and justify his response to a life-threatening situation.

Stephanie Mohr of Maryland

Former decorated K-9 Officer, Stephanie Mohr, formerly of the Prince George's County, Maryland, Police Department, is in her sixth year of a 10-year sentence. Her "crime" was depriving an illegal alien and convicted criminal of his rights under color of law. We continue to maintain that Ms. Mohr committed no crime and her



imprisonment is a travesty of justice.

In September 1995, while in pursuit of suspected robbers, Officer Mohr, after getting the assent of her superior officer, released her police dog, Valk, to stop Ricardo Mendez from fleeing. Valk bit Mendez on the leg, but the suspect was not seriously

injured. Mendez was deported.

Officer Mohr was tried twice. Her first trial ended in a hung jury who voted 11 to 1 for acquittal. Unfortunately her lawyer in the second trial failed to object to incriminating and false statements that Officer Mohr had used a racial epithet in a previous (and unrelated) arrest. Stephanie Mohr categorically denies this baseless claim. However the jury was composed of minorities who were unduly influenced to vote for conviction because of the charge that she was a racist.

Over the past six years, LELDF has assisted lawyers in numerous legal motions and pleadings to bring about her release. Her appeal to the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals was recently dismissed. Attempts to get a commutation have so far been unsuccessful.

Chief Richard Thompson of Nebraska



Despite his acquittal in a criminal trial, Chief Robert Thompson of Crawford (Nebraska) is still fighting a civil lawsuit for wrongful death filed by the family of Jesse Britton. Britton was a violent juvenile delinquent with a long criminal record. Thompson and his partner had hoped that he would turn

himself in. Instead, Britton crouched behind a desk, and, when discovered, pointed a gun at Chief Thompson's head. In self-defense, Thompson fired at the youth. LELDF is providing legal counsel and assistance to help Thompson with the civil lawsuit.

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FROM THE CHAIRMAN

It is not often that I am able to report that we have had two major victories in our cases.

I see it as a good omen for the new year that we have won these cases: that of Sgt. Robert Lawlor of Hartford, Connecticut; and that of three officers from New Mexico — Sgt. Chris Edmondson and Officers Leonard Baca and Nolberto Dominguez.

After legal proceedings lasting four years and a month-long trial, Robert Lawlor was found not guilty of first-degree manslaughter and assault, charges that carried a possible 20-year prison sentence.

Sgt. Lawlor's attorney, Mike Georgetti, praised the work of LELDF in achieving this tremendous victory. "We could not have won this case without the unwavering support of the Law Enforcement Legal Defense Fund," Mr. Georgetti said. I extend my congratulations to him for his exhaustive work on this case, and to Sgt. Lawlor and his family. More details of the Lawlor case are on page one.

Our second victory was in the case of three officers from Raton, New Mexico, who were charged with involuntary

manslaughter in the death of a suspect who died from a drug overdose as he was being transported to the police station. The prosecution dropped the charge when a medical examiner confirmed that the cause of the suspect's death was "excited delirium" from cocaine intoxication. We are happy that our efforts assisted in the exoneration of these innocent men.

As we enter a new year, I want to thank you for your loyal support. We receive no federal grants or monies from foundations. We rely totally on donations from individuals such as you to sustain the important work of LELDF in championing these and other important cases.

I hope we can continue to count on you, because without your generous help, we could not have helped Robert Lawlor, Chris Edmondson, Nolberto Dominguez, and Leonard Baca win their cases.

May your new year be a happy one, filled with many blessings.

Sincerely,



David Henderson Martin



Consider LELDF in Your Planned Giving. You can help ensure that the work of the Law Enforcement Legal Defense Fund (LELDF) will continue by including us in your estate planning. By making a devise to LELDF, you will automatically become a member of our In Defense of Justice Society, and your name will be engraved on our Society membership plaque proudly displayed in our headquarters in Arlington, Virginia. To set this up, contact your attorney or LELDF Chairman, David H. Martin, at LELDF@cox.net.