

MIETRO

Parents of Slain Children Sue District Government Two Young Children Killed by Driver Fleeing Police

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The parents of two young children killed last year by a driver fleeing D.C. police filed a lawsuit today that accuses officers of improperly starting the pursuit. The children, Octavia and Christopher Suydan Jr., 8 and 7, were struck and killed in a noontime accident Sept. 11, 2004, as they crossed Florida and Montello Avenues NE. The driver of the car, Eric Palmer, 19, pleaded guilty to second-degree murder charges.

The lawsuit, filed in D.C. Superior Court, accuses police of gross negligence for chasing Palmer and then not quickly calling off the pursuit.

Wayne Cohen, the lawyer who filed the suit against the D.C. government, said the parents, Towhanna Boston and Christopher Suydan Sr., were seeking answers about what occurred. "Had this chase never begun, the children would be here today," Cohen said.

An internal police investigation found no fault with the officers involved in the incident. Officer Kenny Bryson, a D.C. police spokesman, declined to comment on the suit, saying the department does not discuss pending litigation.

Police have said the incident began when officers tried to make a drug bust in the 600 block of Orleans Place NE, about 10 blocks from the crash site. Palmer sped off when he saw officers. Palmer was not the target of the drug sting, but he had been in court just three days earlier, accused of violating terms of his probation on a drug charge. The judge warned him that he would be jailed if he got into any more trouble.

Police said officers initially pursued Palmer, but quickly cut off the chase.

Witnesses have offered different versions of what happened. Palmer told investigators that he did not see police in his rearview mirror when he turned onto Florida Avenue, about two blocks from the crash site. The entire incident covered 10 residential blocks and lasted about 30 seconds. Palmer's Honda reached speeds as high as 80 mph, police have said.

Christopher Suydan Sr. of Laurel had picked up the children from their mother's home in Temple Hills earlier in the day and was planning to take them to a picnic. He and Boston had separated four years earlier. Suydan was standing just a few feet from the children when they were hit.

Suydan has said he did not see any police near Palmer or hear any sirens that might have given him a warning that the Honda was hurtling down the street.

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