

County Settles Dog-Bite Suit; Deal Comes After \$135,000 Verdict Against Same Officer

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Two weeks after a Prince George's County Circuit Court jury found a county police canine officer liable for an attack on a Capitol Heights man and awarded the victim \$135,000, county attorneys have settled a lawsuit against the same officer for a 1997 attack in which his dog ripped out huge chunks of another man's leg.

At the request of county attorneys, who represent police officers in civil suits, terms of the settlement with the plaintiff, Julius LaRosa Booker, 35, are confidential. Booker's case was settled Jan. 27, according to Circuit Court records.

Deputy County Attorney John Bielec declined to comment. Booker's Riverdale attorney, Terrell N. Roberts III, said he could not comment because of the confidentiality agreement.

County police also declined to comment.

The incident with Booker occurred Oct. 21, 1997. According to Booker's lawsuit and deposition testimony, Cpl. Anthony Mileo and other officers found a stolen van in Capitol Heights and surrounded the vehicle. Booker was inside the van with a prostitute who was smoking crack, according to Booker's deposition testimony.

When he realized officers were outside, Booker ran from the van; Mileo released his dog, which caught Booker by biting him in the leg. Mileo then hit Booker in the head and on the back with his baton, according to the lawsuit. Booker was subdued and handcuffed, after which Mileo continued to let his dog bite Booker, the lawsuit alleged.

Mileo's dog bit off chunks of Booker's right calf. Booker was charged with theft, resisting arrest, assault and assaulting a canine. The state's attorney's office dropped the charges Dec. 29, 1997, the day Booker was scheduled to go to trial.

Booker spent three weeks in Prince George's Hospital Center and now walks with a pronounced limp.

Mileo, 34, did not return a phone call seeking comment. An 11-year member of the force, Mileo left the canine unit last year and is now a patrol officer; police officials said the officer left canine duty of his own accord.

Booker could not be reached for comment; he is serving a three- to five-year prison sentence for aggravated assault in the District.

With the settlement, two of at least three lawsuits accusing Mileo of excessive force in the use of his police dog have been resolved. The third lawsuit is pending.

Two weeks before the Booker settlement, a Circuit Court civil jury found Mileo liable in the Nov. 19, 1997, attack on Willie Walker, also of Capitol Heights.

Walker testified that shortly before 4 a.m. the day of the attack, he was walking to a nearby store to heat up food he had in a container when a county patrol officer stopped him and shoved him against his truck.

Walker testified that the officer, Cpl. Raymond M. Kane, touched him in an "offensive" manner, so he ran away rather than follow the officer's orders to get on the ground. Walker testified that he ran to the front door of a cousin who lived nearby and banged on the door, crying out for help.

At the front door, Walker testified, he gave up, realizing he could not escape. At that point, Mileo's dog began tearing at his legs, Walker testified.

Walker suffered several bites that left him with permanent scars. The jury awarded Walker \$100,000 in compensatory damages, \$24,685 for medical bills and \$10,000 in punitive damages. The county pays the costs of judgments and settlements in civil lawsuits against police officers when they stem from their actions in the line of duty.

With the Walker verdict and the Booker settlement, there are now at least 13 civil lawsuits accusing members of the 23-officer police canine unit with excessive force in the use of their police dogs.

Since early last year, the FBI has been investigating whether the police canine corps has engaged in a pattern of brutality. The FBI also is investigating a June incident in which an officer set her dog on an unarmed robbery suspect; the suspect was critically injured when the dog bit an artery in his leg.

In May, after The Washington Post reported on the pending lawsuits and the FBI investigation, County Executive Wayne K. Curry (D) and Police Chief John S. Farrell announced a series of changes in how county police dogs would be trained and used. Curry and Farrell said the changes would reduce unnecessary and excessive attacks.

Mileo still faces a lawsuit stemming from a Nov. 25, 1998, arrest of a burglary suspect in College Park.

In that lawsuit, Andrew S. Amann, 28, alleges that Mileo beat him about the head with a flashlight and then directed the dog to bite him on the shoulder, arm, torso, leg and ankle after he surrendered.

In Circuit Court records, Amann admitted he broke into the apartment and ran but alleges in his lawsuit that he gave up behind a church on Route 1, at which point Mileo attacked him.

On April 6, 1999, Amann pleaded guilty in Prince George's Circuit Court to one count of first-degree burglary in connection with the incident in which he was attacked, according to court records.

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