

## Newman Family, Girlfriend Sue Prince George's Police

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Correction: An April 19 article incorrectly attributed a quote. The quote, "These things do not happen in a vacuum. This is institutional corruption; it is not just one bad apple," should have been attributed to Christopher Griffiths, the lawyer for the family of Elmer Clayton Newman Jr., who died last fall in police custody. (Published 04/20/2000)

The family and girlfriend of a man who died after being arrested by Prince George's County police last fall filed suit yesterday against the county police department and seven of its officers.

Maryland's chief medical examiner ruled the death of Elmer Clayton Newman Jr. a homicide, but State's Attorney Jack B. Johnson said two weeks ago that his investigation into the circumstances had been thwarted by the refusal of the officers involved to talk about the arrest. Newman's death remains under investigation by the FBI.

The suit filed in Prince George's County Circuit Court yesterday by Newman's girlfriend, LaTanya Dantzler, and members of his family alleges the officers used unnecessary force to subdue him and then were "deliberately indifferent to [his] serious medical needs." The suit seeks \$10.5 million in damages.

"He died at the hands of police," said Christopher Griffiths, the family's lawyer. "And in this county, time and time again, we have seen police officers act in a way that we can't understand and that needs to stop."

The dead man's father, Elmer Clayton Newman, said yesterday that the county should rid the department of the "bad apples so that the good police can get on with their work." But he said, "these things do not happen in a vacuum. This is institutional corruption; it is not just one bad apple."

Newman collapsed and died Sept. 22 while handcuffed in a police holding cell after his arrest at a Suitland apartment he shared with Dantzler. The prosecutor determined that officers broke two bones in Newman's neck, cracked two ribs and inflicted other injuries, but he said his investigation was stymied when five of the seven officers either refused to testify before a grand jury or invoked their Fifth Amendment rights.

According to earlier police accounts of the incident, officers responded to the apartment after Newman called 911. They said Newman was high on cocaine and attacked an officer who knocked on the apartment door. They said officers used pepper spray and physical force to subdue him and that he continued to resist after he was handcuffed. They said the injuries resulted when he banged his head against the wall and floor of his cell.

The lawsuit alleges that Dantzler also was assaulted by the officers and that the county fails to "adequately train, supervise and discipline its police officers against the use of excessive force" and takes no punitive action against those who use inappropriate force.

The officers accused in the lawsuit--all assigned to the Oxon Hill district station--are Sgt. Randall S. Mathews, Cpls. Fred Brockington, Stacy Hampton and Andre Hancock and Officers Carl Copeland, Edward Finn and Jason Johnson.

County Attorney Sean Wallace yesterday did not return phone calls seeking comment.

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