

2 Wrongly Jailed in Slaying Sue Pr. George's, Police, Bank

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An Arizona woman and her daughter who spent three weeks in jail last year after being wrongly charged with murder have filed a civil suit seeking more than \$30 million in damages from Prince George's County, four detectives and SunTrust Bank.

The lawsuit was filed in Circuit Court by Riverdale lawyer Terrell N. Roberts III on behalf of Virginia Shelton, 47, and Shirley Shelton, 17. It accuses county detectives of misrepresenting facts in a charging document.

Detectives alleged that the Sheltons and Jennifer Starkey, Shirley's teenage friend, admitted they had used the stolen debit card of Denise Mansfield at a SunTrust branch in Mitchellville on June 22, 2002. Mansfield, 45, was found strangled in her Mitchellville home a week later. Authorities believe she had been dead since the day her stolen card was used.

The Sheltons and Starkey, who were arrested last spring, told The Washington Post in June that they had never admitted using the slain woman's card.

In naming SunTrust Bank as a defendant, the lawsuit notes that police said they made the arrests after a bank surveillance tape showed the Sheltons and Starkey using debit cards at an automated teller machine. Police said bank officials told them that Mansfield's card was used at the same time at the same SunTrust ATM.

Surveillance specialists said, however, that time stamps on most bank cameras are not synchronized with transactions. Bank officials knew or should have known that, the lawsuit says, but failed to alert detectives.

"We will vigorously defend ourselves against these allegations, which we believe to be unfounded," said Barry Koling, a SunTrust spokesman.

Each of the Sheltons seeks \$5 million in compensatory damages and \$500,000 in punitive damages from detectives Ben Hollowell, Sean Chaney, Marc Alexander and Robert J. Frankenfield. (The county government indemnifies police officers in lawsuits alleging police misconduct.)

Each plaintiff also seeks \$5 million in compensatory damages from the county and the bank.

Barbara Hamm, a Prince George's police spokeswoman, declined to comment, citing the litigation.

The Sheltons and Starkey were arrested April 22 and jailed for 22 days before a Prince George's prosecutor learned that the surveillance tape and bank transaction records were not synchronized and asked a judge to release the woman and teenagers.

Earlier, county detectives charged two D.C. women in the Mansfield slaying, but those charges were dropped. The case remains open.

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