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Napa city, county pay \$5 million to settle suit over child's murder

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Kayleigh Slusher, 3, was murdered in 2014.
Photo: Courtesy Slusher family 2014

The city of Napa and Napa County will pay \$5 million and change how they handle child abuse and neglect cases to settle a lawsuit over the gruesome 2014 torture and murder of a 3-year-old girl that drew national attention.

Kayleigh was tortured and murdered in 2014 by her mother and her mother's boyfriend, who stuffed her body in a duffel bag and stuck it in a freezer for three days before placing it in her bed.

The settlement of the wrongful-death case, announced Wednesday, calls for the city and county to each pay \$2.5 million to Jason Slusher, the father of Kayleigh Slusher, and her grandparents, Robin and Benny Slusher.

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Sara Lynn Krueger, Kayleigh's mother, and her boyfriend, Ryan Scott Warner, were convicted in 2017 of first-degree murder in the torture and killing of the little girl. The cause of death was multiple blunt-force injuries to her head, torso and extremities.

Krueger and Warner were sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

The agencies have also agreed to make changes in their training and policies on how child welfare cases are handled, said Julia Sherwin, the attorney who handled the lawsuit for the child's father and grandparents.

The suit, filed in U.S. District Court in San Francisco, says Kayleigh died in part because of the failure of police and social service workers to recognize that the girl was "suffering abuse, neglect and was in immediate physical danger in her home due to the conduct, crimes and activities" of Krueger and Warner. Police had made multiple visits to the house.

In separate statements Wednesday, the city and county acknowledged the settlement, which was reached last month but said they had followed state law. Napa Police Chief Robert Plummer said the city and police department deny liability in the case, but have made the payments.

Since 2014, he said, they've also improved their policies for reporting suspected child abuse or endangerment and improved their training of officers and dispatchers.

"Kayleigh Slusher's death was a terrible tragedy," he said in the statement. "The City and County of Napa have committed to doing everything in their power to prevent and protect other children from suffering child abuse and neglect."

Molly Rattigan, Napa County's deputy executive officer, said in a statement that the county believes it followed state law in the case but agreed to settle the case to end three years of litigation. She said Child Welfare Services has implemented changes to further review calls to its child-abuse hotline

"I don't have words to describe the pain and agony I have experienced since Kayleigh's death," Jason Slusher said in a statement. "It never goes away. But I want to make sure no child ever suffers the way Kayleigh did."

Sherwin, the attorney, said the settlement satisfied the family's demand that the city and county work to better protect children against child abuse.

"They were always insistent Kayleigh's death not be in vain and they were successful," she said.

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