

# Columbine Records Review Task Force on hold

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- ***Victims families worried that a task force authorized to review 6,300 secret documents regarding the Columbine shootings might be disbanded in early April, but the group will remain intact and awaits review of documents by the Attorney General before continuing to meet.***

April 10, 2003 -- After numerous complaints from the families of victims in the April 1999 shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Attorney General Ken Salazar changed his decision to disband the Columbine Records Review Task Force.

Salazar suggested disbanding the group because newly elected Jefferson County Sheriff Russ Cook was willing to cooperate in the release of records. Former Sheriff John Stone had not been forthcoming with records regarding the Columbine shootings.

Salazar and Jefferson County District Attorney Dave Thomas created the Columbine Records Review Task Force in February 2002 to study concerns regarding the investigation into the death of Daniel Rohrbough during the Columbine shooting. The task force later expanded to address records regarding the shootings of the 11 other students and one teacher.

Randy Brown, a member of the task force acting as a family advocate to those affected by the shootings, said the group started out as a way to "protect this boy" and turned into a way of releasing information.

"There are a lot of records missing," Brown said. "This group was put together to try and restore faith in the government and Jefferson County."

For the past four years, Brown and his wife Judy have researched the shootings and have fought for release of documents regarding the massacre. The Browns' sons were students at Columbine the day of the shootings, but were uninjured. Their oldest son Brooks was friends with the shooters Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris.

Brown and the task force compiled a list of 84 questions they want answered by the sheriff's office. Brown said that despite the attorney general's opinion that Cook is willing to cooperate, the sheriff's office is not complying with the task forces' request for information.

"He [Cook] ran knowing this was going to be an issue," Brown said. "He and Undersheriff Ted Mink told us they would release the information on Columbine because they wanted us to trust them. Now they have reneged on that."

The task force does not have subpoena power or funding and its members serve voluntarily. Brown said there are inconsistencies in the records, tapes and documents that have been released so far. For example, there are about 100 missing police bullets that have been identified as rounds fired, but are not on any ballistics map of the high school.

He also said the original 911 tapes have been released, but that they are out of order and listeners can not tell which calls happened when because the tapes have been cut and spliced into patches.

Pam Russell, public relations director for the district attorney's office, speculated that Colorado's strict laws about releasing medical records and crime scene pictures may explain why the sheriff's office has not released releasing information immediately upon request.

"The task force's work is pretty much done," she said. "Their goal was to have public access to the records and to have those records in one place. And a library in the area has done that for them." Of particular interest to Brown are the "basement tapes" that the two gunmen made hours before the shooting. These tapes have been shown to a few media outlets and parents, however Brown feels the two boys explain a great deal of reasoning behind their motivations for the shootings in these tapes. He also seeks access to search warrants executed during the Columbine investigation and the materials taken during those searches. Brown said the information yet to be released can help school districts and diversion officers to prevent shootings like this in the future.

"I want to forget about it," Brown said. "I want to be able to tell the families: 'Here's what happened and why it happened and now you know.' And they'll at least know why their child died. There is never going to be justice here, it's no matter, the children are still dead. That's what motivates us -- we know they [the sheriff's department] are lying and we can prove it."