

# Post seeks autopsy files

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**Dec. 1, 2000** - Attorneys for The Denver Post asked Thursday in court that sealed autopsies of Columbine victims be made public, while family members of victims pleaded that the documents remain sealed.

"The mass release of these autopsies would be pulling off the scabs of many children," said Dawn Anna, mother of slain student Lauren Townsend.

Attorney James Rouse, who represents six families, argued that a release of the autopsy reports would re-traumatize family members, friends of victims and the Columbine community.

Rouse told District Judge Brooke Jackson that the Columbine community has been struck by numerous tragedies since the April 20, 1999, high school shootings, including the suicides of a victim's mother and a high school basketball star; the unsolved shooting death of two Columbine students at a local sandwich shop; and the murder of a child whose body was left in a shopping center Dumpster close to the school.

Bethany McCandless, the sister of Rachel Scott, who also was killed at Columbine, said she opposes release of the autopsies "because it would be hurtful to my family and me, and friends who knew Rachel and other victims' families."

The family of victim Isaiah Shoels released his autopsy report last year, saying that the world should know how he died, and the autopsy report on killer Eric Harris also has been released.

Last week, 11,000 pages of documents relating to the Columbine shootings were released to the public.

"There comes a point after a tragedy that the facts have to come out," said Tom Kelley, an attorney representing The Post. "I think we are at that point."

Kelley argued that keeping the autopsies sealed is unconstitutional and contrary to the will of the Colorado General Assembly.

Evan Dreyer, city editor of The Post, testified that the newspaper could use the reports to compare with other information that's been released and help establish consistencies, or inconsistencies, about the worst school shooting in the nation's history.

The newspaper might also comb the reports and decide that they contained no news, he added. Either way, Dreyer testified that editors would use great discretion if the reports are unsealed.

"I'm pained to be asking for these autopsies knowing that it will cause your clients pain," Dreyer said under examination by Rouse. "But journalistically, in my heart, I know that these are public documents that should be released."

Jackson said he does not expect to make a decision until after the Christmas holidays.