

columbine

Danger sign ignored?

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April 7, 2001 - JEFFERSON COUNTY - Eric Harris' online threats about killing and bombing were taken seriously enough by sheriff's investigators in 1998 that they made plans to search his home.

Investigators drafted a search warrant for the home of Harris' parents a year before he and Dylan Klebold went on a deadly shooting rampage at Columbine High School, but the affidavit was never finished and the search never was conducted.

A judge Friday ordered the release of the search-warrant affidavit and other documents. The draft seemed to contradict previous official statements about what the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department could have done about Harris' vicious writings on the Internet. In the past, officials have said they couldn't follow up on complaints about Harris' Web site because the complaining party requested anonymity and failed to file a formal complaint. A Sheriff's Office spokesman refused Friday to comment on the affidavit until he had seen it. District Attorney Dave Thomas said the affidavit wasn't sufficient to support a search of the Harris home, although sheriff's investigators didn't ask him to review it until a week after the shootings on April 20, 1999.

"They asked me if I had seen it a year earlier, would it have been adequate to search the house," Thomas said Friday. He told the investigators the affidavit lacked probable cause to show that there was anything of a criminal nature in the house, Thomas said.

On his Web site, Harris made death threats and wrote that he and Klebold were planning a mass killing. Randy and Judy Brown contacted the Sheriff's Office on March 18, 1998, because their son was threatened on the Web site.

"They have never given a reason why they haven't pursued it," Randy Brown said Friday. "First they said there was no report. Those guys are full of baloney." The Browns, other parents and at least one lawsuit filed over the shootings claim that if investigators had taken action regarding Harris' behavior, evident a year earlier, the tragedy would not have occurred.

Brown said he has known about the affidavit for more than a year. He said it indicates either Harris' father got the Web site investigation squelched to protect his son or the Sheriff's Office was incompetent, which he doesn't believe. The Harrises' attorney wasn't available for comment Friday.

Brown said he never asked the Sheriff's Office for anonymity for him or his son. The draft affidavit for the warrant came to light Friday when Jefferson County District Judge Brooke Jackson ordered its release to some of the victims' families and to CBS News. The judge also ordered the release of four more evidence notebooks; a detective's memo about 47 events that occurred in the school's library, the site of most of the 13 deaths in the

shootings; and audio tapes and other material related to interviews with officers involved in the first response to the shootings.

The release of the material won't occur until this week or later, a county spokeswoman said. CBS made its request for more materials after discovering that there were missing documents from the 11,000 pages of investigative reports that the county released last year.