



Columbia and Boone County shell out nearly \$300,000 for Ryan Ferguson lawsuit defense

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COLUMBIA — The city of Columbia and Boone County have spent a combined total of about \$294,000 defending government and employees in Ryan Ferguson's civil rights lawsuit.

The city faces even more expenses given that the remaining six defendants are either current or former city employees.

Through August, the city and county had spent \$81,857 and \$211,976, respectively, on the case.

The city and Boone County, along with four other defendants, were [dismissed](#) from Ferguson's \$100 million federal lawsuit on Sept. 4. The motion to dismiss the six defendants, which came from Ferguson's attorney, Kathleen Zellner, was granted by U.S. District Judge Nanette Laughrey.

The four other defendants dismissed from the suit were former Columbia police Sgt. Stephen Monticelli, former Columbia police Chief Randy Boehm, and William Haws and Ben White, Boone County Prosecuting Attorney's Office investigators.

Boone County Circuit Judge Kevin Crane, who prosecuted Ferguson before he was elected to the bench, also was dismissed as a defendant in the case.

All six defendants were dismissed without prejudice, meaning they can be added to the case later.

The remaining defendants are former Columbia police detectives John Short, Jeff Nichols, Jeff Westbrook, Bryan Liebhart and Latisha Stroer. Stroer still works for the department, not as a detective, but as a police spokeswoman.

The city paid for its own legal representation and is paying to defend the remaining six defendants, city risk manager Sarah Perry said. The firm that represents the six defendants is Schreimann, Rackers, Francka & Blunt.

The county paid to defend itself and the three county-affiliated defendants. Through late August, the county had already spent a little more than \$210,000 on the suit. The Boone County Commission amended its budget to move \$240,000 from the county's statutory emergency fund into its outside legal services budget to accommodate future costs. The county and its affiliated defendants were dismissed from the suit soon after.

Dan Simon, a Columbia attorney representing Crane, billed the county \$43,758.

Michael Berry, the Jefferson City prosecuting attorney for Haws, billed the county \$17,564.

Brown and James is the law firm that represented Boone County and White. It billed the county \$123,586.

Jefferson City attorney Scott Pool billed the county \$27,068 for an insurance review that, according to county counselor C.J. Dykhouse, was not directly related to the Ferguson suit but was used to determine whether county insurance was enough to cover federal lawsuit costs.

Dykhouse said the commission will return the \$240,000 to the statutory emergency fund.

Ferguson was [convicted](#) in the 2001 murder of Columbia Tribune sports editor Kent Heitholt in 2005 and served eight years of a 40-year sentence before [the conviction was vacated](#) by the Missouri Court of Appeals Western District. Ferguson was [released from prison in November 2013](#).

Ferguson's lawyers filed the civil rights lawsuit in March. It claims that prosecutors and investigators failed to adequately investigate other potential suspects or to adequately disclose evidence.

The suit is scheduled to go to trial in August.

Supervising editor is [Scott Swafford](#).