

Claim is filed in deputy's slaying

Parents of Palmdale officer allege he worked so much OT he couldn't stay alert



CLINKUNBROOMER family members have filed a \$20-million wrongful-death claim against the county. (Luis Sinco Los Angeles Times)

BY KERI BLAKINGER

The parents of a Los Angeles County sheriff's deputy have filed a claim signaling they plan to sue the county, alleging that their son was forced to work so much overtime that he was too fatigued to stay alert and avoid threats such as the mentally ill 29-year-old who gunned him down outside the Palmdale station in September.

Deputy Ryan Clinkunbroomer was [shot in the head](#) while driving in a marked patrol car on the evening of Sept. 16. Days later, [authorities announced the arrest](#) of Kevin Cataneo Salazar, who was later charged with murder and pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity.

In the government claim filed Monday, the slain deputy's parents — Kim and Michael Clinkunbroomer — said they will ask for \$20 million in damages. They alleged that “the murder could have been prevented” if the Sheriff's Department and Sheriff Robert Luna hadn't created a safety hazard by forcing deputies to work such long hours.

“The Sheriff's Department knew or should have known that deputies would be targeted for execution and needed sufficient rest in order to avoid foreseeable tragedies of death,” the claim says. “Disregarding the safety of his troops, Sheriff Luna continues to force his deputies [to] work mind-numbing overtime resulting in Ryan's death and the likely death of other deputies.”

In an emailed statement early Tuesday, the Sheriff's Department did not respond to the claims about excessive overtime but reiterated support for the prosecution of Clinkunbroomer's killer.

“The senseless ambush murder of Deputy Ryan Clinkunbroomer was the epitome of evil, and the Department continues to mourn his death,” it said. “We lost a valued member of our Department family who was committed to serving our communities. The Sheriff's Department remains committed to securing a successful prosecution against the individual responsible for Ryan's murder.”

Lawyers for the county declined to comment.

The night of the killing, Clinkunbroomer left the sheriff's station around 6 pm. Surveillance footage showed that a gunman in a dark gray Toyota Corolla pulled up alongside his patrol car at a traffic light. Authorities said the driver shot Clinkunbroomer in the head “ambush style” before driving away.

A passerby found the 30-year-old deputy — affectionately known as “Clink” by his friends — unconscious in his vehicle at the intersection of Avenue Q and Sierra Highway. Fellow deputies took him to Antelope Valley Medical Center in Lancaster, where he died as physicians tried to treat his gunshot wounds.

Police arrested Cataneo Salazar as the sole suspect 36 hours after the shooting. His mother, [Marle Salazar](#), told The Times he had been hospitalized for mental health issues and twice attempted suicide. He is being held without bail in the Twin Towers Correctional Facility, a downtown jail typically used to house mentally ill detainees.

At the time of his death, Clinkunbroomer was [newly engaged to be married](#), and he spoke often to his friends about his desire to start a family.

“Ryan was the best guy I've ever met,” his fiancée, Brittany Lindsey, said at a news conference after his killing. “I am so happy I was able to love him. It was not long enough.”

Described [by colleagues](#) as a “deputy’s deputy,” Clinkunbroomer was a third-generation lawman who’d been with the Sheriff’s Department for eight years by the time of his death. His grandfather retired from the same department as a captain in 1999 and his father retired as a lieutenant two decades later.

His family’s government claim, filed by attorney Bradley Gage as the legal precursor to a lawsuit, says that Clinkunbroomer was forced to work more than 100 hours of overtime every month, leaving him “physically and chronically exhausted” and “suffering from fatigue.”

The claim attributes the need for overtime to the department’s high vacancy rate, allegedly caused by “consistent, historic executive mismanagement” that has left an average of 2,000 deputy positions — nearly 20% of the force — vacant. According to Gage, there were so many vacancies at the Palmdale station that 40% of the evening shift typically had to be covered by other deputies working overtime.

“What that means is that the community is at risk, and the deputies are in danger because of exhaustion,” Gage told The Times. “This is something that the county has been aware of for years, yet they have intentionally allowed to continue.”

The department did not immediately confirm the attorney’s staffing figures. In October, sheriff’s officials told The Times there were 1,200 vacancies, a figure that did not account for deputies relieved of duty or otherwise unable to work.

In an emailed statement Tuesday, Richard Pippin, president of the Assn. for Los Angeles Sheriff’s Deputies, chimed in with his own concerns about the number of empty positions.

“The department’s staffing crisis is pushing our deputies to, and sadly sometimes beyond, their limits,” he wrote. “We need our elected officials to take a more aggressive and intelligent approach to addressing the department’s inability to recruit and retain qualified people.

“Failure to do so can only result in more tragic outcomes,” Pippin wrote, “not only for our deputy sheriffs, but for the millions of people who rely on them for protection.”

The Clinkunbroomers will have to wait at least 45 days between the government claim and when they file suit, Gage said. He told The Times he plans to file one case in state court, but he said he may also pursue a federal lawsuit.

“A lawsuit like this can bring attention to the problem and help to force a change so that other families don’t go home at Thanksgiving to another empty seat at the table,” Gage said. “And that’s a big, important factor in this lawsuit — we want to bring about change.”