

NEWS > CRIME AND PUBLIC SAFETY

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JonBenet Ramsey murder probe soon to get fresh eyes



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A long-awaited review of the JonBenet Ramsey murder investigation by the Colorado Cold Case Review Team, with the cooperation of the Boulder Police Department, is set to take place before the year’s end.

The decision to submit the case to outside review coincided with the reassignment of a detective who had long held primary responsibility for its investigation.



Boulder police said Thursday that the November 2022 reassignment of Commander Thomas Trujillo had no connection to the Ramsey case. It did, however, generally coincide with the department’s agreement — just after Trujillo’s reassignment — to welcome greater involvement by other investigating agencies. Trujillo was assigned to the detective bureau at the time of JonBenet’s December 1996 murder. He was one of two lead detectives on the perplexing case throughout much of its duration.

On Nov. 1, 2022, Trujillo was moved from the Investigations Unit to the Watch 3 Patrol after an internal probe into the Investigations Unit found that multiple cases had not been pursued, or fully investigated, by former detective and current patrol officer Kwame Williams — whom Trujillo supervised.

Also last November, Boulder police announced they would begin consulting with the Colorado Cold Case Review Team — a collection of one analyst, one forensic investigative genetic genealogy analyst, two DNA scientists, one latent prints forensic scientist and a supervisor, according to the Colorado Bureau of Investigations website.

The police also said they would continue to work with the FBI, the Boulder County District Attorney’s Office, the Colorado Department of Public Safety, the Colorado Bureau of Investigation and several private DNA laboratories across the nation.

Boulder police spokeswoman Dionne Waugh wrote in an email that the reassignment of Trujillo had “absolutely nothing to do with the JonBenet investigation” though, “some tabloid reporters mistakenly believe it’s connected.”



Commander Thomas Trujillo
Photo credit: Boulder Police Department

‘Frustratingly slow business’

John Andrew Ramsey, the 47-year-old stepbrother of JonBenet Ramsey, who was out of the state at the time of JonBenet’s death, said his father petitioned Gov. Jared Polis last year for new DNA testing to be conducted, for the case to be removed from the Boulder Police Department, and for it to be handed over to the CBI’s Cold Case Team and Cold Case Task Force.

The Cold Case review was approved, but the investigation remains under the Boulder Police Department’s ultimate control.

Ramsey said Friday that the family's lawyers have submitted letters and other possible evidence or information they've received over the years to the police in order for it to be digitalized for submission to the CBI.

After meeting with Boulder Police Chief Maris Herold and Deputy Chief Stephen Redfearn in January of this year, Ramsey said he's "very satisfied with the actions they're taking."

"It can be a frustratingly slow business, is the reality," Ramsey said in reference to cold case investigations. "I'm glad the work is being done. It's just to get a fresh look and get an outsider's perspective and unbiased expert opinion on what steps should be taken. With any problem where you get stuck in the hole or rut, you turn to outsiders for help."

While Ramsey did not say if he thought Trujillo specifically delayed the murder probe, he said he was not satisfied with his meetings with the detective.

"You can draw the diagram," Ramsey said. "Detective Trujillo is in charge of this thing for 26 years up until November, December of last year, and then poof, we have this very different stance from the police. So... it's different."

Ramsey said he thought that for a significant part of the almost 27-year-old investigation, the case was in the hands of biased detectives.

"I think up until the beginning of this year, it resided with detectives who had long ago formed a bias," Ramsey said. "They had been involved in the case for its entirety and the case required new leadership, fresh perspectives, and that lack of a bias."

Ramsey added that with BPD's recent efforts, he believes they have the "best shot" at solving the puzzle now, due to the availability of forensic genealogy testing — which enables law enforcement to create a DNA profile from evidence that can then be compared to public databases in order to identify matches.



Daily Camera file photo
JonBenet Ramsey

The 2018 arrest in California of Joseph James DeAngelo Jr. as the long-sought Golden State Killer, is one of the better-known examples of that technique delivering results. DeAngelo pleaded guilty in 2020 to 13 counts of first-degree murder and 13 counts of kidnapping, receiving multiple consecutive sentences of life in prison with no chance of parole.

The benefit of outside experts

In the November 2022 Boulder police news release, the department said the DNA evidence available for analysis is extremely small and complex, and could be consumed by DNA testing.

“Whenever there is a proven technology that can reliably test forensic samples consistent with the samples available in this case, additional analysis will be conducted,” Waugh wrote in the release.

Boulder County District Attorney Michael Dougherty said the police department has brought together a multi-agency team that has been working hard on the murder probe.

“At times, investigations can benefit from the perspective and input of outside experts — especially with advances in technology and forensic tools,” Dougherty said, in an email about the police’s efforts to present the investigation to the Colorado Cold Case Team.

“It is absolutely the right course of action,” Ramsey said. “JonBenet was a 6-year-old little girl who was taken from her bed and brutally murdered and there needs to be accountability for that and we need to hold that person responsible.

“The chief [of police] is doing the right thing here, is the bottom line. Through all the politics and everyone’s opinion on this, she is absolutely doing the right thing.”

JonBenet was reported missing in a phone call by her mother, Patsy Ramsey, early on the morning of Dec. 26, 1996, when she said she found a ransom note demanding \$118,000 for the child’s safe return on a staircase inside their home in the 700 block of 15th Street in Boulder.

JonBenet’s body was recovered from the family’s basement several hours later. The Boulder County Coroner determined she had suffered a fractured skull, been asphyxiated with a garotte and was sexually assaulted.

The Daily Camera learned in 2013 that a grand jury had voted in October 1999 to indict both her parents, John and Patsy Ramsey, on charges of child abuse resulting in death and accessory to the crime of first-degree murder — an indictment not announced at that time. No charges were ever actually filed in the case, however, based on then-District Attorney Alex Hunter’s decision that there was insufficient evidence to support a conviction.

Patsy Ramsey died in June 2006, after a long battle with cancer.

In the 2022 release, Boulder police said detectives have investigated leads stemming from more than 21,000 tips, letters and emails and traveled to 19 states to interview more than 1,000 individuals.



The former Ramsey family home in Boulder, as seen on Wednesday. The Boulder Police Department’s probe into 6-year-old JonBenet’s 1996 murder is expected to be reviewed by the Colorado Cold Case Task Force before the end of the year. (Cliff Grassmick/Staff Photographer)

After JonBenet’s death, the Ramsey family never spent another night in the Boulder house where she was killed, formerly addressed as 755 15th St., but now identified as 749 15th St.

The selling price of the property has dropped by about \$700,000 since the start of 2023. It is currently listed at almost \$6.25 million, according to the LIV Sotheby’s International Realty website.