

No charges to be filed in Ramsey murder case

BOULDER, Colo. (AP) — A grand jury decided there was insufficient evidence to indict anyone in the JonBenet Ramsey slaying, ending a 13-month investigation into the case, District Attorney Alex Hunter announced yesterday.

"The Boulder County grand jury has completed its work and will not return," Hunter said. "No charges have been filed. I must report to you that I and my prosecutorial team believe we do not have sufficient evidence to warrant the filing of charges against anyone who has been investigated at this time."

The 12 jurors, who have met for more than 13 months, left the Boulder County Justice Center without comment about two hours before Hunter issued a statement.

Hunter declined to answer questions and said he would meet with the news media today.

The brutal crime set off a drawn-out, controversial search for her killer.

The prominence of the family —

the father, John Ramsey, is the millionaire president of Access Graphics; the mother, Patsy Ramsey, is a former Miss West Virginia — and the beauty of the little blond victim guaranteed worldwide attention for nearly three years.

"I must report to you that I ... believe we do not have sufficient evidence to warrant the filing of charges."

— Alex Hunter
Boulder County district attorney

It was before dawn on the day after Christmas in 1996 when Patsy Ramsey says she found a ransom note on the back staircase in the family's home demanding \$118,000 for the safe return of JonBenet.

"Listen Carefully!" the note begins. "We are a group of individu-

als that represent a small foreign faction. We respect your business but not the country that it serves. At this time we have your daughter in our possession."

Eight hours later, Ramsey said he found his daughter's body in a basement room, wrapped in a white blanket. A rope was wrapped around her neck and a wrist and tied to a stick.

A red-ink heart was drawn on her left palm, and Ramsey told police he removed duct tape from the child's mouth before carrying her body upstairs.

An autopsy concluded JonBenet suffered a skull fracture, was strangled and beaten, and may have been sexually assaulted.

Critics claimed the investigation was compromised early when detectives, believing they were dealing with a kidnapping, allowed friends and family to roam through the Ramsey mansion. They also asked Ramsey to conduct a search, which led to the discovery of the body.

Rhode Island files suit over paint

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — Rhode Island has become the first state to sue the makers of lead paint, seeking millions to pay for removing the paint from homes and caring for poisoned children.

Inspired by the national tobacco settlement, state Attorney General Sheldon Whitehouse sued eight paint manufacturers this week and called on the industry to "take responsibility and clean up its mess."

"This silent, invisible poison is the result of intentional, deliberate, informed decisions made by the lead paint industry," Whitehouse said yesterday.

Whitehouse said the paint companies should pay for treating children affected by lead poisoning, for providing special schooling to children with learning disabilities attributed to lead paint and for removing the paint from homes. Other states have expressed interest in joining the lawsuit, Whitehouse said.

Donald E. Scott, an attorney for the paint com-

panies, called the lawsuit a "groundless and wasteful action."

"This litigation tries to make a scapegoat of companies," Scott said. "It substitutes legal wrangling for serious efforts to reduce childhood lead poisoning."

Eighty percent of the state's homes were built before lead-based paint was banned in 1978, and Rhode Island's lead-poisoning rates are three times the national average. One in five children in the state suffer from lead poisoning, state health officials said.

Lead poisoning can cause a variety of ailments, ranging from lower IQs and learning disabilities to seizures and death.

Lead paint is particularly hazardous to children who can easily ingest the toxin when they chew on flakes or when they put their hands in their mouth after crawling through the fine dust created by the opening and shutting of painted windows.

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