

Judge: B.I.G. family lawyer deceitful

LOS ANGELES (AP) - A federal judge who declared a mistrial in the wrongful death lawsuit brought by the family of slain rapper Notorious B.I.G. against the city of Los Angeles said she believed an attorney for the family had "absolutely deceived" the court.

U.S. District Judge Florence-Marie Cooper's remarks last week came after an attorney for the city alleged the plaintiffs' lawyers lied to the judge when they claimed the city withheld documents that could have bolstered their contention that rogue Los Angeles police officers were involved in the entertainer's killing.

The 24-year-old rapper from Brooklyn, whose real name was Christopher Wallace, was shot and killed March 9, 1997, after a party at the Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles.

The murder has not been solved.

Cooper declared a mistrial last summer in the family's civil lawsuit after finding that a police detective intentionally hid statements by a jailhouse informant linking the killing to two former officers, David Mack and Rafael Perez.

The judge also ordered the city to pay \$1.1 million in legal fees and other expenses to the rapper's family.

The trial began in June, with plaintiffs trying to show that Mack, a convicted bank robber, orchestrated Wallace's killing with the help of a college friend on behalf of Death Row Records chief Marion "Suge" Knight. All three have denied involvement.

The trial stopped abruptly when the plaintiffs' attorneys said they had received an anonymous tip from a former officer who said a police informant had tied Perez and Mack to the killing.

The tip led to an investigation of the police department's Robbery-Homicide Division that uncovered statements by a former

Perez cellmate, who had told the department that the disgraced officer had confessed to participating with Mack in Wallace's killing.

In a status conference held last Tuesday in preparation for a retrial, defense attorney Vincent Marella showed the judge a report prepared by a private investigator for the plaintiffs indicating knowledge of the informant's remarks as early as 2002.

After looking at the report, Cooper said she was "outraged" and admonished Perry Sanders, the attorney for Wallace's family, over the telephone.

"I believe you have absolutely deceived this court into

believing that you knew nothing about this," Cooper said.

Sanders replied that after telling the court last year that he knew nothing about the informant, he realized that his defense team had been "previously contacted" by the informant. Sanders said he then "made it clear" to the court about the matter.

In an interview, Sanders told The Associated Press he believed the city's attorneys took a document that his defense team provided to them and "used it against us."

A spokesman for the city attorney's office declined to comment on the case because

he did not attend the status conference.

Cooper halted the sharing of information between both parties and said she was not inclined to allow Wallace's family to file a revised version of their lawsuit, as they have sought.

The judge also noted that both parties have been unsuccessfully trying to settle the case.

One month after the mistrial was declared, the Los Angeles City Council rejected the family's offer to settle the case for \$18 million.

"This might be the time to settle this case," Cooper said.

Katrina victim found in New Orleans house

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Less than a week before the next hurricane season starts, firefighters still searching for those missing after Hurricane Katrina have found another body.

A DNA test will be needed to identify the body; the only certainty is that it was an adult male, said John Gagliano, chief coroner's investigator in New Orleans.

It was found Saturday in the rear laundry room of a house in Mid-City, where most houses are raised several feet but floods still reached the attached mailboxes, nearly chest-high.

The house was fifth to be checked of 47 addresses given to the search team Friday, said Capt. Kenneth Kirsch of the New Orleans Fire Department.

The addresses came from

the Louisiana Family Assistance Center, a state agency that has a list of 226 people missing since the 2005 hurricanes.

A state Health and Hospitals Department list of missing people shows Huey Hughes, 76, at the address where the body was found, but authorities could not confirm that Saturday. The mailbox shows a different name.

The agency this month raised the number of Louisiana residents killed by Katrina by 281, to 1,577, after more reports of out-of-state deaths came in. Several states have yet to file reports of possible Katrina deaths. More than 80 percent of the missing are from Orleans Parish, and 66 percent are African-American.

FEMA this month announced that its list of people

missing from the 2005 hurricane season had fallen from 12,000 shortly after Katrina to fewer than 300.

Now, eight months after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, it's likely that many of the lost will not be found," FEMA said May 18 in a statement. "Some may have been swept away forever in the floodwaters, and some may not want to be found."

The Louisiana Family Assistance Center handles an ever-changing list of addresses of people missing since Katrina hit Aug. 29. The list, last updated May 2, has 481 names.

The New Orleans firefighters are working as part of Southeast Louisiana Task Force One — 16 firefighters, most working on a day off and paid by the Federal Emergency Manage-

ment Agency. Since FEMA began the 90-day contract on March 2, the team has found at least a dozen bodies, mostly in the Lower Ninth Ward.

Cadaver dogs, canines trained to locate the scent of dead bodies, are still part of the search effort, said Kirsch, particularly when teams search the Lower Ninth, where instead of homes they

often must sift through huge debris piles.

"In debris, it's the dogs that lead us," Kirsch said. "We can't find anything in a pile of debris without a dog hitting on something to lead us in that direction."

Financial and logistical obstacles have often stopped or slowed the search crews since Katrina, Kirsch said. The recovery mission started

shortly after the storm but temporarily shut down Dec. 10 because of lack of money, he said.

Search crews directed by the Army Corps of Engineers also checked the 2,100 flood-battered houses on the city's list for demolition. In the future, more money will be needed to send out search teams if houses are added to the demolition list, he said.

Muhammad

(Continued from Page 2) failure to meet deadlines calling on witnesses. He originally wanted to call hundreds of people to the stand, but the judge limited him to just a few dozen because he failed to follow proper courtroom procedure.

Many witnesses did not want to take part in his defense, refusing to show up at court even though they were issued subpoenas by lawyers helping Muhammad with his case.

In Maryland, Muhammad was charged with first-degree murder for the deaths in Montgomery County of James Martin, Premkumar Walekar, James "Sonny" Buchanan, Sarah Ramos, Lori Lewis Rivera and Conrad Johnson.

Maryland prosecutors



Victim's relative Vijay Walekar speaks to the media about the guilty verdict in the murder trial of convicted East Coast sniper John Allen Muhammad on Tuesday at the Montgomery County Judicial Center in Rockville, Md.


originally sought a death sentence, but dropped those plans earlier this year. Muhammad's Virginia defense attorneys and some victims questioned whether it was necessary to reopen old psychological wounds from

more than three years ago.

Muhammad could still face prosecution for earlier shootings in Alabama and Louisiana. He and Malvo are linked to other shootings in Maryland, Arizona, Georgia and Washington state.


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