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Killed teen's parents to get rest of settlement

By LAURA FIGUEROA

Four years after Jaime Gough, an honors student at Southwood Middle School, was stabbed to death in the school's bathroom by a classmate, state lawmakers approved a bill releasing \$1 million in settlement money for the family.

The decision, which came just minutes before midnight on Tuesday, was two years in the making, after a similar proposal went nowhere in the Legislature last year.

For the Goughs, the two years have meant early morning flights from Miami to Tallahassee to tell legislators about their son, a shy kid who aspired to be a scientist. There were numerous days of sitting through marathon meetings, rehashing memories of their lost son while lawmakers debated whether or not his death could have been prevented by the Miami-Dade school district.

"It was hard, but we always kept our faith," Jorge Gough said.

Though the district accepted liability for the teen's death and agreed to a \$1.7 million settlement, the final decision was in the hands of the Legislature, which must approve payouts by local governments above certain amounts. The district has already paid the family the first \$700,000.

LONG ODDS

Earlier in the year, the chances of the claims bill passing did not appear promising, after a special magistrate ruled against it, contending that the school had no way of preventing Jaime's death in February 2004. He was stabbed in the neck 40 times by classmate Michael Hernandez, now 19 and awaiting trial on murder charges.

"No one sends their child to school expecting them to lose their life," said Gregg Schwartz, the family's attorney. "The pain will never disappear."

Also working on behalf of the family were Sen. Frederica Wilson, a Miami Gardens Democrat, and Rep. Carlos Lopez-Cantera, a Miami Republican, who sponsored the legislation calling for the family's compensation.

'NOT MUCH COMFORT'

"I can't think of anything worse than sending your child to school at 7:30, and getting a call at 9:30 to go to the trauma center because your son has almost been decapitated," Wilson said. "There's not much comfort you can give after something like that."

Wilson said she often received e-mails and calls to her office from some of Jaime's former classmates, now in high school, inquiring about the Goughs and the bill.

"This is a young man who will never be forgotten," Wilson said.

Dealing with Jaime's death inspired the Goughs to create a support group for grieving families. Every other Thursday they gather with 20 others at the Miami Temple Seventh Day Adventist Church to share stories of loved ones, to console each other through their faith.

This Thursday the couple will have another story of faith to share with the group.

"Whatever happened would have been OK," Jorge Gough said about awaiting the Legislature's decision. "Our faith has carried us through this."

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