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**June 19, 2006**

**Statement from Sheriff Ted Mink**

Last November the Colorado Supreme Court instructed me, as custodian of records relating to the 1999 Columbine High School shootings, to determine whether or not to allow inspection of certain records by the public. The records in question include video recordings made by Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris (sometimes referred to as the "basement tapes"), audio recordings made by Eric Harris, as well as writings penned by Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris. They also include writings by Wayne Harris, Eric's father.

In its ruling, the court directed me to undertake a balancing test, weighing several different factors before making a decision. As part of the balancing test, I would consider the opinions of those who would be impacted by the records' release, the public purpose to be served by the release, and any other pertinent considerations.

I contacted the families of those killed at Columbine, as well as those injured at Columbine and their immediate families. Because this group suffered the most personal impact from the events of that day, their opinions weighed heavily in my decision.

After sending out letters to 56 individuals or families, I received responses by phone and mail from about half that number\*. There was no overwhelming mandate from this group. Their responses ran the spectrum from the desire for full release of all items, to release of only a portion of the items, to no release at all. Some suggested releasing the information to family members only. Many who supported the release of the items were emphatic about the idea of studying the records in an effort to prevent future tragedies. Many of those who were opposed to release cited their concerns about copycat shootings, notoriety for the killers and re-traumatization for themselves and their children.

I also took into account the opinions of others in the Columbine community, the news media and the general public. I received letters from a few current and former staff members at Columbine High School, who were polarized on the subject. The Denver Post, as a party to the lawsuit seeking the records' release, made its professional opinion known more than a year ago. The Denver Rocky Mountain News also contacted the Sheriff's Office specifically to express its support for the records' release. Unsolicited e-mails from the general public, which came from as far away as Australia, were varied — some expressed their interest in viewing or studying the tapes, while others opposed release based on their belief that it would only satisfy the perverse curiosity of a few.

In an effort to give due attention to other pertinent considerations, I contacted the FBI's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, Behavioral Analysis Unit — a group comprised of law enforcement experts in the disciplines of psychology, criminology, sociology and violent criminal behavior. The group's experts on violent crimes and school shootings agreed to review the tapes and evaluate the potential value of release to the general public. The Behavioral Analysis Unit prepared a report on its findings.

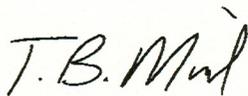
Their analysis determined that the video and audio tapes could serve as a strong motivating influence for other adolescents to commit and/or attempt to commit similar acts of violence. The tapes provide instructional material for how to successfully plan and implement similar acts. They concluded that the message contained in the tapes is intensified by the visual and audio impact of Harris and Klebold delivering the message.

**After carefully listening to and weighing the various opinions — both personal and professional — I have determined not to release the video or audio recordings. It is clear that releasing them could have devastating consequences. The Sheriff's Office will release 936 pages of documents seized from the killers' homes and vehicles after the shootings.**

My decision not to release the video and audio recordings will be unpopular among many, including some who have a personal connection to the Columbine shootings. There are those who have been led to believe that these tapes hold the key to all the answers of Columbine. In truth, thousands of pages of documents and other evidence have been released over the years, and no one item has held the key. In my mind, no new insight the tapes might provide can justify the loss of just one life.

We know that Klebold and Harris wanted to kill as many people as possible. They also wanted to get their message perpetuating hate and violence out to others like them. We cannot turn back the clock to that tragic day to prevent the killing of innocent people at their school. But today, I have the opportunity to prevent the mass distribution of their message inciting hate and violence.

We cannot just release the tapes, cross our fingers and hope against all logic that no harm will come. I feel that I have more responsibility than that on my shoulders, and I sincerely believe that not releasing these recordings is the right thing to do.



Ted Mink  
Sheriff