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Rick Wershe was an FBI informant at 14. Now he's suing feds, Detroit police for child abuse

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On the one-year anniversary of his release from prison after 32 years, Richard Wershe Jr. filed a lawsuit Tuesday accusing former FBI agents, ex-Detroit police officers and former federal prosecutors of child abuse in connection with his time as an informant when he was a teen.

"I want this chapter in my life closed," said Wershe, a former FBI and Detroit police informant known as "White Boy Rick," as he was surrounded by his mother Darlene and other family members Tuesday.

Wershe, 52, said he had wanted to file the lawsuit many years ago but his two former attorneys feared that if he did he would have no chance at being released.

The press conference was the first time Wershe talked to reporters at length since being released from prison a year ago after serving 32 years and seven months behind bars.

Former Detroit police officers William Jasper and Kevin Green and retired FBI agents Herman Groman and James Dixon are named as defendants in the lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in Detroit. The suit also names former federal prosecutors Lynn Helland, who is now the executive director and general counsel of the Michigan Judicial Tenure Commission, James King and a third listed as "unknown." The city of Detroit is also named as a defendant.

A spokeswoman for the Detroit office of the FBI declined to comment.

Detroit Police 2nd Deputy Chief Rudy Harper said "We have not seen the lawsuit nor the allegations..."

Helland had no immediate comment. Dixon, a former Southfield resident, reportedly died in 2018.

Groman said Wednesday, "I read the recent lawsuit filed by Mr. Wershe in Federal court, and I am disappointed by his "buy in" into the fictional Hollywood version of his life story. Sadly, he forgot to mention my advocacy for his release over the many years to include testifying on his behalf at 3 parole hearings and placing him in the federal witness program until he was terminated because of his involvement in a stolen car scheme while in the program. I look forward to straightening out the record on this matter."

In the lawsuit, Wershe candidly recounted his time as a teenage informant who was allegedly first approached by FBI agents when he was 14. According to Wershe and his attorneys, the Detroit teen regularly met with FBI agents and Detroit police officers to give information on Detroit's burgeoning drug gangs.

"Had I not been an informant for the task force, I would never have gotten involved with drug gangs or criminality of any sort," Wershe claims in the lawsuit. He maintains he did not come up with the moniker "White Boy Rick" but rather it was the media that gave him the description.

Wershe said Tuesday he was used by the FBI agents and the Detroit police officers for information about drug gangs and left to serve out a long prison sentence for a 1988 drug conviction even when they had promised that they would help him out since he cooperated with them for information.

"The justice system hasn't been fair to me," Wershe said Tuesday. "This needed to be known. The truth needed to be told."

Wershe said Tuesday he will embrace **the** White Boy Rick name and use it as a "platform" to do good in the community through his longtime food giveaway program and to help others by working toward prison reform.

The lawsuit alleges that Wershe's time as an informant began when he was first approached by the FBI after his father contacted the agency because his daughter started dating a known drug dealer.

Wershe Jr. became a target of local criminals in his neighborhoods when there was "likely suspicion" raised among them that the teen was an informant, according to the lawsuit.

"In November of 1984, there was an attempted (assassination) of Plaintiff whereby he was shot at point-blank range with a .357 magnum, cutting his large intestine in half and only surviving by the grace of God," reads the lawsuit.

After being shot, reads the lawsuit, Wershe was "further endangered" by agents and police when they "coerced" him to remain an informant, according to the lawsuit.

"It was obvious to most that the shooting was not an accident, (Wershe) was told to cover it up to greatly increase his credibility on the streets and more importantly to the Defendants that it would allow them to continue their abuse of (Wershe), the lawsuit states.

Wershe was released from prison on July 20, 2020, after more than three decades behind bars. He was serving a life sentence on a drug conviction when he was sentenced at age 17 in a Wayne County courtroom in 1988.

Wershe said Tuesday he was never a drug kingpin as he was depicted in some news stories.

Wershe was later sent to Florida after Michigan authorities sprung him early from a state prison and released him to the Sunshine State to serve a prison sentence in connection with a car theft ring he was accused of being part of when he was being housed in a Florida prison in the federal witness protection program.

Wershe's new attorney Nabih Ayad said the FBI and Detroit police put Wershe, now 52, at risk when he became an informant.

"They didn't want it to be known a child was working for the FBI," said Ayad Tuesday. "(Wershe) did many things to help our government."

"Consequently, Wershe also holds the record as the longest-serving prisoner convicted as a juvenile on a nonhomicide offense in the State of Michigan: 32 years and 7 months; his entire adult life," said Ayad. "Wershe was shot while acting as a confidential informant for the FBI and DPD at age 15, and, outrageously, they continued to use him to infiltrate high-level drug gangs in Detroit in the 1980's after this attempted assassination."

Wershe's life story has been the subject of several documentaries and a movie starring actor Matthew McConaughey.

Groman and fellow-retired FBI agent Gregg Schwarz have spoken in the past on behalf of Wershe during his lengthy battle to be released from prison as Wershe saw other inmates convicted of drug crimes leave years earlier.

Ayad said Tuesday after filing the suit that "Groman tried later (to help Wershe) but the damage had already been done."

Ayad said "we didn't want to include Helland but we had no way around it as he made promises to Rick. He did want to help Rick, but his hands (were) tied."

Wershe is the father of three grown children and a grandfather of six. Wershe's father, Richard Wershe Sr., died while his son was in prison.

"It's been difficult. I lost nearly 33 years of my life," said Wershe Tuesday. "I lost time with my children. My father's not here."

Wershe's longtime attorney, Ralph Mussili died in February at the age of 77. Musilli told The News last year that Wershe's lengthy incarceration was an "inexcusable" and unusual punishment.

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