

City votes to settle suits in deaths

By Patrick McGreevy
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The Los Angeles City Council voted Friday to pay \$2.15 million to settle two lawsuits stemming from a 1992 double murder-suicide, committed in Glendale by an off-duty LAPD officer involved in a domestic dispute with his estranged wife and her lover.

The council also voted to conduct a review of the Los Angeles Police Department's policy on domestic violence because of concern that the department knew Officer Victor Ramos had pointed his city-owned service revolver at his wife at her workplace three months before he killed her.

The Police Department took away Ramos' service weapons after the first incident. But council members were particularly troubled that the department gave the weapons back to Ramos just two months before the fatal shooting without a required written psychological evaluation

Council OKs \$2.15 million in '92 slayings

saying the officer was capable of carrying a gun.

"Clearly, in 1992, potentially some action could have been taken that wasn't," said Councilwoman Laura Chick. "This is just a glaring example of how important it is that the department change in these matters."

The lawsuits were filed on behalf of survivors of Ramos' wife, Melba, and the widow of Gregory Thomas.

Melba Ramos and Gregory Thomas were shot to death by Victor Ramos on Aug. 12, 1992, when the off-duty West Los Angeles police officer burst into his estranged wife's Glendale apartment and found his wife and Thomas in bed, according to a report by the City Attorney's Office.

Victor Ramos, 29, then killed himself.

Gregory Yates, an attorney representing the plaintiffs in the lawsuit, said the LAPD

contributed to the crime by failing to follow proper procedure.

"The Police Department's failure to effectively deal with spousal abuse . . . is very egregious and frightening," Yates said.

Ramos should have been arrested May 18, 1992, when he beat his wife and pointed his gun at her, Yates said.

Senior Assistant City Attorney G. Daniel Woodard said policy at the time required Ramos to be evaluated by a city Personnel Department psychologist to determine whether Ramos was fit to return to work and get his gun back — a procedure that was not followed.

During a civil trial, the city argued that it should not be held responsible for the actions of one of its officers when he is off-duty and under the influence of alcohol.

But a Superior Court jury in Glendale awarded Thomas' widow \$1.7 million in

1995 — of which \$650,000 was owed by the city for its allocation of fault in the case.

A federal lawsuit filed on behalf of the Ramoses' three young children and the dead woman's parents was scheduled to begin this month. It charged a pattern of not prosecuting police officers for domestic violence.

The City Attorney's Office recommended a \$1.5 million settlement of that case, fearing the city could face a major judgment.

The council vote to approve the settlement of the two cases was 9-2, with Councilmen Joel Wachs and Nate Holden voting no.

"It's taxpayers' dollars," Holden said. "If this guy had been a street maintenance man, a janitor, an office worker, and he had done this to himself, his wife, the city wouldn't pay a nickel. But because he is a police officer, they are saying they have a special right to sue."

Wachs said he was protesting large jury awards against the city.