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# Rondon family of Lawrence settles with Columbia Gas over teen's death



BOSTON, MA. – OCTOBER 25: Attorney Doug Sheff announces a lawsuit on behalf of the family of Leonel Rondon, the teen who was killed as a result of the Columbia Gas explosions in Lawrence, on October 25, 2018 in Boston, Massachusetts. (Staff Photo By Angela Rowlings/Boston Herald)

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By **LISA KASHINSKY** | [lkashinsky@bostonherald.com](mailto:lkashinsky@bostonherald.com) |

The family of Leonel Rondon, the 18-year-old from Lawrence who was killed in last September's gas explosions in the Merrimack Valley, has settled its claims against Columbia Gas of Massachusetts, the parties announced Tuesday.

The settlement was "the result of voluntary mediation between the parties," according to a press release. The amount of the settlement is confidential.

Rondon was the sole fatality of the Sept. 13 gas disaster, which injured two dozen others and damaged or destroyed more than 100 homes. He died when a chimney dislodged from a house on Chickering Road in Lawrence and landed on the car Rondon, who had just gotten his driver's license, was sitting in.

The Rondon family attorney Doug Sheff said, "Leonel tragically lost his life when a chimney from a nearby house fell onto a car. He was only 18 years old and full of life. He loved science and had a passion for music. He dreamt of going to college and cared for his family members in every way possible. His mother, Rosaly, described Leonel as 'the happiness of the house.'

"The family can only hope that this kind of catastrophe will never happen again. Nothing can replace the loss of Leonel and the Rondons will continue to cherish his memory, his loving support and positive impact on his family and community," Sheff continued.

Sheff Law will establish a scholarship fund to encourage an ongoing interest in public safety and community service. Columbia Gas will also set up a scholarship fund in Rondon's name, independent of the settlement, the company said.

Joe Hamrock, president CEO of NiSource Inc., parent company of Columbia Gas, said, "We remain heartbroken over the tragic loss of Leonel Rondon and again express our deepest sympathy to his family and to the entire community."

"We recognize the pain that remains and understand that nothing we can ever say or do will bring Leonel back to his loved ones or erase that pain. Since this tragic event, we have always wanted to do the right thing for the Rondon family and all of those affected, and we are pleased to have reached this settlement," Hamrock said.

Columbia Gas previously settled with the Figueroa family of Lawrence, several members of whom were injured in the gas-fueled blasts. It was the chimney of the Figueroa's home that landed on the car Rondon was in.

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Gov. Charlie Baker said Tuesday, "I'm glad that it's been settled. I'm sure for the families there's a little bit of satisfaction in that. But fundamentally I don't know how you ever get over the loss of a child, and my heart goes out to both families and to everybody who was affected by this — but it especially goes out to that family because they lost their son."

*Mary Markos contributed to this report.*

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## Lisa Kashinsky

Lisa Kashinsky is an award-winning multimedia journalist and general assignment reporter for The Boston Herald. A graduate of Boston University, she previously covered the Merrimack Valley for The Eagle-Tribune and the South Shore for Wicked

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