

Press kit: the death of John Combs.

A 24-year-old IBEW Local 196 lineman, found dead in Montgomery, Alabama on October 4, 2024. The death was ruled a suicide. **His family does not accept that ruling.**

Every claim links to its source. Use anything, from this page or from the PDF.

PRESS CONTACT

press@justiceforjohncombs.org

LAST UPDATED OCTOBER 3, 2026

THE FAMILY'S POSITION

The family does not accept the suicide ruling.

This is the on-the-record position of John's family, stated publicly by his father and on the family's Facebook page. They dispute a manner-of-death ruling issued, they say, before an investigation was underway, while their son's phone, wallet, and backpack remained unaccounted for and 161 miles of his final movements remained unexplained.

"Ruled a suicide before an 'investigation' was even underway. But couldn't give the family his wallet, phone and backpack?? Autopsy states they couldn't examine his right [side]."

JUSTICE FOR JOHN COMBS FACEBOOK PAGE
(OCTOBER 13, 2025)

"Nobody has lifted a finger to find out what actually led up to his death."

CHRIS COMBS, JOHN'S FATHER ·
SHAW LOCAL · OCTOBER 5, 2025

FOR PRODUCERS AND PODCASTERS

If you produce a true-crime podcast or documentary, this case has what your audience looks for and what your research team needs: a documented timeline, a named witness, agencies on record declining to share information, and a family that will speak on the record. The family is open to long-form interviews.

Write to press@justiceforjohncombs.org. If you need raw materials (high-resolution photos, the Substack archive, original Facebook posts, scanned correspondence), say so when you write.

WHO HE WAS

John Combs

AGE AT DEATH

24

HOMETOWN

Rochelle, Illinois

OCCUPATION

Journeyman lineman

UNION

IBEW Local 196 (Huntley, IL)

EMPLOYER AT TIME OF DEATH

Red Rover Electric

DATE OF DEATH

October 4, 2024

WHERE

Struck by a train approximately one mile from Montgomery Regional Airport, Alabama

SOURCES [SHAW LOCAL · OCTOBER 5, 2025](#) [LAKE AND MCHENRY COUNTY SCANNER · OCTOBER 12, 2024](#)

[WSFA 12 · NOVEMBER 18, 2024](#)

TIMELINE

The last eleven days.

SEPTEMBER 24,
2024

John flies from Illinois to Louisville, Kentucky, then drives to Savannah, Georgia, to work storm restoration for Red Rover Electric for about a week.

[SHAW LOCAL · OCTOBER 5, 2025](#)

SEPTEMBER 27,
2024

Hurricane Helene sweeps into Georgia. Power is knocked out for roughly 1.5 million people. Around 20,000 linemen, including out-of-state contractors like John, mobilize for restoration.

[WTOC 11 · JANUARY 16, 2025](#)

OCTOBER 1, 2024

Amber Powell, a Wilmington Island resident, sees what she describes as a lone lineman in a bucket truck near a golf course on Wilmington Island Road. She hears a loud noise and sparks rain onto her car. Red Rover Electric later denies that any crew member would have been working alone.

[WTOC 11 · JANUARY 16, 2025](#) [WTOC 11 · OCTOBER 13, 2025](#)

OCTOBER 2, 2024 John is hospitalized for what Shaw Local describes as "disorientation, paleness and sweating." He calls his father, says he "couldn't put his thoughts together," and sends the text: "I've lied about everything in my life, I have no idea what is real and what is not, I want to come home." He later leaves the hospital against medical advice. His father says he never noticed any suicidal tendencies in John.

[WSFA 12 · NOVEMBER 18, 2024](#) [SHAW LOCAL · OCTOBER 5, 2025](#)

[ROCHELLE NEWS-LEADER · DECEMBER 5, 2024](#)

**OCTOBER 3, 2024
(MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT)** John pulls out his IVs, puts his clothes back on, and walks out of the hospital. He takes a rental car toward Atlanta.

[WSFA 12 · NOVEMBER 18, 2024](#) [WTOC 11 · OCTOBER 13, 2025](#)

**OCTOBER 3, 2024
(DURING TRAVEL)** He sends his brother his location from a KOA campground.

[JUSTICE FOR JOHN COMBS FACEBOOK PAGE \(FAMILY REPLY TO A COMMENTER\)](#)

**OCTOBER 3, 2024
(AT THE AIRPORT)** At Atlanta airport, as passengers line up to board a Southwest Airlines flight, John stands up and speaks to them. A witness later paraphrased what he said: "My name is John Combs from Rochelle, Illinois. My whole life has been a lie. I'm no good at anything I do. I don't want to be a lineman anymore." He is removed from the boarding process because of his behavior. His luggage flies home to Illinois. He does not.

[WTVO / MYSTATELINE · JUNE 11, 2025 \(REPORTING BY WICS\)](#) [FOX 5 ATLANTA · NOVEMBER 12, 2024](#)

[ROCHELLE NEWS-LEADER · DECEMBER 5, 2024](#) [SHAW LOCAL · OCTOBER 5, 2025](#)

OCTOBER 4, 2024 John's brother Patrick pings his location in Montgomery, Alabama. When Chris Combs calls, John says he is "in the woods." Chris later describes their last conversations as "short and odd." Using phone records and account activity, Chris and Patrick reconstruct John's final afternoon as a series of Uber rides and stops in eastern Montgomery: a CVS Pharmacy, a Burger King, a Starbucks, a gas station, and a hotel he had booked but never checked into. John is found dead, struck by a train approximately one mile from Montgomery Regional Airport, 161 miles from Atlanta. How he traveled this distance is unexplained.

[WSFA 12 · NOVEMBER 18, 2024](#) [SHAW LOCAL · OCTOBER 5, 2025](#)

[ROCHELLE NEWS-LEADER · DECEMBER 5, 2024](#) [WTVO / MYSTATELINE · JUNE 11, 2025](#)

OCTOBER 8, 2024 The Montgomery Police Department informs the family that John was struck by a train and died the previous Friday, October 4. The family had filed a missing persons report and searched until this notification.

[SHAW LOCAL · OCTOBER 5, 2025](#) [ROCHELLE NEWS-LEADER · DECEMBER 5, 2024](#)

What was ruled, and what the family rejects.

Kept as two separate lists on purpose. The first is what the agencies concluded. The second is what John's family disputes and why.

THE OFFICIAL FINDINGS

- Manner of death ruled suicide by the Alabama Department of Forensic Sciences. The Montgomery Police Department handled the investigation.
[WTOC 11 · OCTOBER 13, 2025](#)
[WTVO / MYSTATELINE · JUNE 11, 2025](#)
- Cause of death: blunt-force trauma.
[SHAW LOCAL · OCTOBER 5, 2025](#)
- No drugs or alcohol detected in his system at autopsy.
[SHAW LOCAL · OCTOBER 5, 2025](#)
- OSHA closed the case, finding no evidence the death was work-related.
[SHAW LOCAL · OCTOBER 5, 2025](#)
[WTOC 11 · JANUARY 16, 2025](#)
- Montgomery Police declined to tell WTOC in October 2025 whether the case remains active.
[WTOC 11 · OCTOBER 13, 2025](#)

WHAT THE FAMILY DISPUTES

ON THE RECORD

- The family does not accept the suicide ruling, and has said so publicly.
[SHAW LOCAL · OCTOBER 5, 2025](#)
[WTVO / MYSTATELINE · JUNE 11, 2025](#)
[JUSTICE FOR JOHN COMBS FACEBOOK PAGE \(OCTOBER 13, 2025\)](#)
- The family states the ruling was made before an investigation was underway.
[JUSTICE FOR JOHN COMBS FACEBOOK PAGE \(OCTOBER 13, 2025\)](#)
- His father says he never noticed any suicidal tendencies in John.
[WSFA 12 · NOVEMBER 18, 2024](#)
- Phone never recovered. Wallet never recovered. Backpack never returned to the family.
[SHAW LOCAL · OCTOBER 5, 2025](#)
[ROCHELLE NEWS-LEADER · DECEMBER 5, 2024](#)
- Lower right arm "unaccounted for" in the autopsy, per the family, which says the autopsy "couldn't examine his right [side]."
[JUSTICE FOR JOHN COMBS FACEBOOK PAGE \(SEPTEMBER 25, 2025\)](#)
[JUSTICE FOR JOHN COMBS FACEBOOK PAGE \(OCTOBER 13, 2025\)](#)
- 161 miles between the Atlanta airport and where John was found in Montgomery, with no documented method of travel.
[WTVO / MYSTATELINE · JUNE 11, 2025](#)
[WSFA 12 · NOVEMBER 18, 2024](#)
[SHAW LOCAL · OCTOBER 5, 2025](#)

-
- Southwest Airlines told the family it would share nothing without a subpoena. Atlanta Police and Montgomery Police told the family they would share nothing at all.

WTVO / MYSTATELINE · JUNE 11, 2025

AGENCIES INVOLVED

Where each one stands.

Montgomery Police Department

Handled the investigation. Declined to tell WTOC in October 2025 whether the case is still active. Told the family it would share nothing.

WTVO / MYSTATELINE · JUNE 11, 2025

WTOC 11 · OCTOBER 13, 2025

Alabama Department of Forensic Sciences

Issued the suicide ruling.

WTOC 11 · OCTOBER 13, 2025

Atlanta Police Department

Told the family it would share nothing.

WTVO / MYSTATELINE · JUNE 11, 2025

OSHA

Sent the family a letter. Closed its case, finding no evidence the death was work-related.

WTVO / MYSTATELINE · JUNE 11, 2025

SHAW LOCAL · OCTOBER 5, 2025

Rep. Darin LaHood (R-IL-16)

His office has worked with the family to open a congressional investigation.

SHAW LOCAL · OCTOBER 5, 2025

WTVO / MYSTATELINE · JUNE 11, 2025

VIDEO

Watch and embed.

Family interviews and station segments. The shorts are embeddable. The station clips open on the outlet's own player.

FEATURED FAMILY INTERVIEW

REPORTED BY

Eliza Petry

NEWSCHANNEL 20 / FOX ILLINOIS

Eliza grew up on a grain farm in Ogle County, the same county as John's family. She has stayed with this story as agriculture reporter and evening anchor at NewsChannel 20 / Fox Illinois.

COMPANION ARTICLE

Tragic twist ties two generations on historic date amid Combs family searching for answers

NEWSCHANNEL 20 / FOX ILLINOIS

Watch the interview: [youtube.com/shorts/1parHklcsmc](https://www.youtube.com/shorts/1parHklcsmc)

STATION SEGMENTS

WSFA 12 · MONTGOMERY, AL

NOVEMBER 18, 2024

Illinois family seeks answers after son killed in Montgomery

<https://www.wsfa.com/video/2024/11/18/illinois-family-seek-s-answers-after-son-killed-montgomery/>

WTOC 11 · SAVANNAH, GA

JANUARY 16, 2025

Family of lineman who died following Helene recovery efforts grasping for answers

<https://www.wtoc.com/2025/01/16/missing-man-family-line-man-who-died-following-helene-recovery-efforts-grasping-answers/>

A NOTE ON CREDIT

The video and reporting above are the work of the journalists and newsrooms credited. We embed and link rather than re-host. If you are reporting on John's case, please attribute the original outlet and the original journalist in your own coverage.

Particular thanks to [Eliza Petry](#) at NewsChannel 20 / Fox Illinois; to [WTOC 11](#) in Savannah, whose January 2025 investigation surfaced the Wilmington Island witness; and to [WSFA 12](#) in Montgomery for the first detailed local report.

SOURCES

Every claim above traces to one of these.

Where an outlet has moved or taken down a story, the link goes to an archived copy on the Wayback Machine, so it can still be read.

01 **WSFA 12 • November 18, 2024**

<https://www.wsfa.com/2024/11/18/illinois-father-seeks-answers-after-son-found-dead-montgomery/>

02 **WTOC 11 • January 16, 2025**

<https://www.wtoc.com/2025/01/16/missing-man-family-lineman-who-died-following-helene-recovery-efforts-grasping-answers/>

03 **WTOC 11 • October 13, 2025**

<https://www.wtoc.com/2025/10/13/death-lineman-who-went-missing-after-helene-restoration-work-ruled-suicide/>

04 **Shaw Local • October 5, 2025**

<https://www.shawlocal.com/ogle-county-news/2025/10/05/rochelle-father-seeks-answers-one-year-after-sons-mysterious-death-in-alabama/>

05 **WTVO / MyStateline • June 11, 2025**

<https://www.mystateline.com/news/local-news/father-seeks-answers-in-son-death/>

06 **Lake and McHenry County Scanner • October 12, 2024**

<https://www.lakemchenryscanner.com/2024/10/12/member-of-huntley-based-union-working-storm-restoration-dies-after-being-hit-by-train-in-alabama/>

07 **Rochelle News-Leader • December 5, 2024**

<https://web.archive.org/web/20250815210101/https://rochellenews-leader.com/stories/family-of-rochelle-man-who-passed-away-in-october-in-alabama-seeking-answers,77262>

Archived copy. The original page now redirects to a section front.

08 **Rochelle News-Leader • 2025**

<https://web.archive.org/web/20250815174928/https://rochellenews-leader.com/stories/father-of-rochelle-man-that-died-in-october-in-alabama-still-searching-for-answers,100586>

Archived copy. The original page now redirects to a section front.

09 **Fox 5 Atlanta • November 12, 2024**

<https://www.fox5atlanta.com/news/illinois-john-combs-james-combs-atlanta-alabama>

10 **NewsChannel 20 / Fox Illinois**

https://www.newschannel20.com/features/agriculture/tragic-twist-ties-two-generations-on-historic-date-amid-combs-family-searching-for-answers/article_612d48bf-9e85-452e-a8b1-1e2a48b27f89.html

11 **Justice For John Combs Facebook page**

<https://www.facebook.com/p/Justice-For-John-Combs-61568778761718/>

CONTACT

How to reach the family.

PRESS CONTACT

press@justiceforjohncombs.org

Say what you need: documents, photos, or an interview.

PHOTOS AVAILABLE FOR USE

Original-resolution photographs of John are available on request. Email the press contact and say what you need them for, and the family will send approved files with the credit line they want used.

THE FAMILY

Chris Combs, John's father

Rochelle, Illinois. Reach the family through the press contact.

UPDATES

justiceforjohncombs.substack.com

Subscribe on Substack for updates as the case develops.