

# Lawsuit filed against Detroit police in killing of Aiyana Stanley-Jones

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The family of Aiyana Stanley-Jones, who was murdered by police during a nighttime raid at her home last weekend, has filed suit against the Detroit Police Department (DPD) in state and federal court. The suit accuses the DPD of civil rights violations, gross negligence and conspiracy to cover up what actually took place at 5044 Lillibridge Street by attempting to implicate Aiyana's grandmother, Mertilla Jones, in the event.

The seven-year-old was shot to death by Officer Joseph Weekley, after being severely burned by an incendiary device thrown through a plate glass window by a SWAT team storming the residence.

Speaking at a press conference on Tuesday, Attorney Geoffrey Fieger said that a video taken of the incident clearly reveals that the bullet that penetrated Aiyana's head and neck was fired from outside the home through either the shattered window or the front door. The DPD has been claiming Weekley's gun accidentally discharged during an altercation with Mertilla Jones inside the home.

Fieger called upon officers present at the scene to come forward and provide truthful testimony about the raid, which was filmed by the cable television channel A&E as part of its law-and-order program, "The First 48."

According to the Stanley-Jones family, in the immediate aftermath of Aiyana's death, the DPD attempted to hide its own culpability by persecuting and spreading false rumors about Aiyana's grandmother. After witnessing her granddaughter's slaying, Mertilla Jones, age 46, was arrested and held by police for 12 hours. At first put in the Detroit lockup, she was then transferred to the city's receiving hospital and tested for drugs.

In order to sustain its claim that Mertilla Jones' interference with police caused the shot that killed Aiyana, the DPD checked her for gunpowder residue, which would have been on her skin had she been anywhere near the officer at the time the gun was fired. Finding nothing, the police released Mertilla. Despite this, the DPD has continued to claim that Aiyana's grandmother either collided with or jostled Weekley, leading to the firing of the fatal shot.

Weekley, a 14-year veteran of the police force, is currently under investigation for his part in a 2007 SWAT team raid, in which he is alleged to have pointed guns at children and shot two dogs.

Mertilla Jones will be filing a separate lawsuit against the DPD for false arrest and conspiracy.

At Tuesday's press conference, Fieger underscored the fact that the DPD used overwhelming violence during the raid, despite knowing that children resided at the home. In addition to Aiyana, three other youngsters were in the house at the time—Carlos (age four), Pierre (age two), and Christian (age three months). The day of the nighttime assault, a police surveillance vehicle was parked outside 5044-5046 Lillibridge Street for many hours, observing the Stanley-Jones family come and go. The children's toys were in plain sight in the front yard.

In the minutes just before the raid, hooded officers detained Aiyana's cousin, Mark Robinson, just outside the home. Robinson, who had gone out to walk the family dog, repeatedly told the DPD, "There are children in the house," while being pinned to the ground with officers' boots on his neck and back, Fieger said.

The attorney also told reporters that the DPD had not secured a proper warrant for the operation. The SWAT team raided the home in order to arrest Chauncey Owens, the fiancé of Aiyana's aunt; the two live together in a separate upstairs apartment. The address for that residence is 5046 Lillibridge Street. The address for the flat where Aiyana was sleeping, and for which the DPD had a warrant, is 5044 Lillibridge. Despite the obvious discrepancy and knowing that Owens was in the upstairs apartment from having observed the house all day, police entered both residences simultaneously, Fieger said.

While some press reports have stated that Aiyana's father is implicated in the homicide for which Owens was arrested and that he harbored Owens in his home, Fieger denied these allegations. He insisted that these claims, as well as the harassment of Mertilla Jones, are intended to "scare" the family.

Detroit's Democratic Mayor Dave Bing, who said nothing about the slaying for days, responded to news of the lawsuits by insisting that the family's attorney had not gotten the facts right. He implied that there are no grounds for allegations of a cover-up. Bing went on to reject calls by Detroit Democratic Congressman John Conyers for a federal investigation, stating, "I'd rather keep it local."

The mayor also attempted to shield the DPD from criticism by insisting that the murder of the second grader at the hands of the police was no more significant than other violent crimes in the city. "The unfortunate thing is that we are now focusing everything on Aiyana's death," he said. "Where's the outrage when a 17-year old is killed or a 69-year-old grandmother? Everybody is making the police out to be villains," he said, but this was not true; "they're here to protect people."

Bing repeatedly insisted that he did not "want to jump to conclusions, point fingers, and lay blame," but went on to defend the police force. "I don't think they are the problem," the mayor said while speaking to reporters at a "Pancakes and Politics" breakfast for business leaders and elected officials on Wednesday.

The effort to cover for the police and divert attention from the brutality of their tactics was echoed by Reverend Al Sharpton, who will speak at Aiyana's funeral on Saturday. Sharpton indicated that he would denounce both police misconduct and "black-on-black" violence. According to a spokesperson for his National Action Network, both are equally to blame.

This is nonsense. The violent methods employed by the DPD are only one expression of the general assault that has been carried out by big business and the government against the Detroit population for decades. This is the cause of the social decay and crime that plague the city, not "black-on-black" violence or, as Mayor Bing called it, "a cultural problem."

In wiping out jobs and decimating Detroit's infrastructure and public services, corporations have transformed the city into a sea of desperation. In carrying this out, they have worked hand-in-hand with the Democratic Party, which has run the city for decades. In Detroit 50 percent of the working age population is out of a job, well over a third of residents live under the official poverty line, and by the end of this year more than half of the city's schools will have been closed since 2006. Facing a disenfranchised and hostile population, the police force regularly resorts to outright brutality.

In his comments to the press on Wednesday, Bing pointed to the homicides and criminal acts that take place daily in Detroit. He noted, "When people don't have jobs, they get frustrated and angry," but insisted, "I don't know how to

stop it [the violence], quite frankly."

This is an extraordinary admission. On the one hand, the mayor acknowledges in passing the real source of crime in Detroit, but on the other hand, says that he cannot conceive of how it could be resolved. Bing went on to issue platitudes about the important role of "community-based organizations."

Bing, a multimillionaire businessman with myriad corporate backers, is deeply hostile to the needs of the great mass of working people in Detroit. He is opposed to any and all measures that would significantly improve living standards in the city, much less rebuild it as the thriving metropolis that it once was. His plan is rather to shrink the city and drive out as many poor as possible or simply leave them to rot, all under the rationale that there is simply "no money" to provide for the population. The DPD will play a central role in this process and in protecting the wealth of city's businessmen.

The mayor's response to Aiyana Stanley-Jones' killing at the hands of the police is a testament to how far to the right the black political establishment in Detroit has moved over the course of the past two decades. In 1973, Coleman Young was elected as the city's first African-American mayor on the basis of express opposition to police violence. Even in 1992, after years of presiding over the decimation of Detroit, Young publicly denounced the beating death of Malice Green at the hands of the DPD, who he observed, "literally murdered" the man while in custody.

Now, this same social layer, personified in Bing, does not even feel the need to pretend to have a critical attitude towards the police and their violent methods. Any pretense of being antiestablishment has long since been abandoned, after decades in which black politicians insisted that the solution to the problems of the country's impoverished African-American population was the election of black leaders.



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