

Lawyer for suspect in shooting of Ferguson cop says confession was coerced

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Twenty-year-old Jeffrey Williams, the suspect in the shooting of two Ferguson, Missouri police officers during a protest in early March, was beaten into making a confession shortly after his arrest, according to his lawyer. Williams faces two counts of first-degree assault, one count of firing a weapon from a vehicle, and three counts of armed criminal activity. These charges carry a possible sentence of life in prison.

Attorney Jerryl Christmas maintains that Williams told him he was choked, beaten across the back, and pistol-whipped on the top of the head by two officers. Christmas told reporters he found extensive bruising on Williams' back, neck, face and shoulders during a two hour meeting in prison on March 16, the day after Williams' arrest.

Christmas also found a knot on top of Williams' head, allegedly from the butt of a police officer's gun. He was unable to take pictures of the bruises.

Williams had not been given access to counsel at the time of his confession.

"[Williams] said he was bruised by the police when he was taken into custody," Christmas told reporters. "And he was in a lot of pain when he was being questioned. They used a lot of force on him. It appears that whatever statements he made, he was without the advice of counsel, and when I look at the bruising, it's hard for me [to] assess if these were voluntary statements that he made."

Christmas explained that Williams, who has no history of violence, was taken into custody by police the Sunday after the shooting for violating probation for a previous conviction on charges of credit card theft. He was not aware that he was being arrested until he was taken in for questioning.

Police claim to have recovered a .40 caliber handgun from Williams' house matching the casings found at

the crime scene. They say they found the weapon while serving a search warrant based on a bugged conversation between Williams and an anonymous police informant in which Williams allegedly admitted to the shooting.

Christmas expressed skepticism about the police findings, insisting that Williams made no such statements to the police informant. "I went back and asked my client about it and he reaffirmed that he would never have said that to anyone because he did not fire a weapon that night," Christmas told the media last week.

Christmas denied that Williams even had a gun that night. "This was not an ambush shooting," Christmas said. "I believe the police were shot accidentally. ... I'm not aware of my client shooting at all that night."

There is good reason to believe that Williams' attorney is telling the truth, and that the police picked Williams practically at random. St. Louis County Prosecutor Robert McCullough proved himself capable of such a travesty of justice four months ago when he knowingly allowed perjured testimony to be given to a grand jury in his effort to obtain a decision not to indict Ferguson officer Darren Wilson, who shot and killed an unarmed African American teenager, Michael Brown, last August.

The March 11 shooting that slightly injured two Ferguson police was immediately seized upon as an excuse to raid the homes of protest leaders at gunpoint. However, despite claims by McCullough to the contrary, there is no evidence that Williams was seriously involved in the protests.

While Christmas admits that Williams was attracted to the March 11 protest as a "hangout" spot, he maintains that he was not a regular participant in the protests, a claim that has been corroborated by several

protest leaders.

The March 11 shooting of the police officers was used to discredit opposition to police brutality. This is despite the fact that it is by no means clear the police were even the intended target.

At a bail hearing on Tuesday, a Missouri judge denied Christmas' request to reduce Williams' bail, which is currently set at \$300,000. Christmas argued that the bail level was unusual for shooting cases where the victims survive, and cited Christmas' lack of a history of violence and his pregnant girlfriend. Prosecutor Bart Calhoun countered by citing the alleged shooting as evidence that Williams posed a public risk if freed. He added that "the evidence in this case is overwhelming," given the confession Williams gave to the police.

Christmas repeated his argument in statements to reporters after the hearing that the police had coerced Williams' confession. "He said he never fired a weapon," the lawyer said, adding, "He didn't have a weapon. I just don't believe that any statements were made voluntarily."



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