

Inkster, Michigan residents to foot the bill for police beating settlement

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Residents of the impoverished Detroit suburb of Inkster, Michigan will be forced to pay \$1.4 million in additional taxes to cover a settlement payment to a man who was beaten by police following a traffic stop in January.

Floyd Dent, a 57-year-old Ford worker, was brutally beaten by Inkster police officers after he ran a stop sign with an expired license. A subsequent video showed not only the beating, but also police planting cocaine at the scene of the crime.

The one-time tax, known as a millage, set to take place this summer, will tax residents based on the value of the property, costing residents \$325 if they own property valued at \$50,000.

The millage means that the working class residents of the city will be forced to pay the tab for the systematic police brutality they are themselves subjected to on a regular basis.

The majority African American city's poverty rate is over 38 percent, and the unemployment rate is nearly twice the national average. The median income is \$26,181, and the median home value is \$55,400.

This is the fourth time in the last two years a millage was used to cover the settlements in a police brutality case in Inkster. Another recent millage cost taxpayers \$220,000.

"I think it's just horrible," Inkster resident Sandra Stuvent told the *Detroit Free Press*. "Taxes are high enough. Why should we pay for something we didn't do?"

Fellow resident Cary Bradkowski declared, "This has happened four times in the city of Inkster, you'd think after the first or second people would wake up."

Simuel Rose, another resident, told the local press, "Every little thing they want to put on the back of the citizens."

In the 1920s and 30s, Inkster became the home of many African Americans who relocated to the Detroit area from the South to work in the city's bustling auto and manufacturing industry. At the time, black workers were banned from living in the city of Dearborn, where many factories were located, and many chose to live in nearby Inkster.

Inkster Mayor Hilliard Hampton sought to distance himself from the millage, telling the *Huffington Post* he was forced into it by the city's financial straits. "We have a disproportionate number of citizens who are on the social safety net, we have a disproportionate number of seniors," he said. "This is the third time we've been levying those folks who are on fixed incomes. Those who can afford it the least are being hit by something they have no involvement in."

But as the newspaper put it, "The mayor stopped short of criticizing the police department," and did not even raise the possibility that the settlement could be paid for from police department funds.

The city of Detroit has itself paid out more than \$27 million on police misconduct settlements since 2008, according to local news station WXYZ. Denver has recently paid out \$13 million in settlements, while Chicago has paid \$521 million over the last 10 years. New York City has spent \$735 million in police brutality settlements in 2012 alone.

Dent was stopped by police the night of January 28, pulled out of his car and beaten by officer William Melendez while being restrained and tased by two other officers.

Melendez claimed that Dent bit him on the arm and was resisting arrest, but charges against Dent were dismissed after police dash camera footage refuted police claims and showed officers planting cocaine at the scene.

Melendez has a long history of filing false reports, planting evidence, using excessive force and making unlawful arrests. In his years as an officer he has had 12 lawsuits filed against him, many of which have had settlements paid to the victims.

In one incident, he and fellow officers entered the house of an unarmed man and shot him dead. The family received a settlement payment of \$50,000.

In 2003 Melendez was indicted as one of eight Detroit police officers accused of violating residents' civil rights, writing false police reports and planting false evidence. Melendez stepped down from his position from the Detroit police in 2007 before becoming an Inkster police officer.

Andy Shaw, head of the government watchdog organization that has studied the cost of police brutality in cities throughout the country, told the *Washington Post*, "The price of this is enormous and it probably is hardest on those who can least afford it and whose communities are most egregiously beset with the misconduct problems."



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