

Notes on police violence

# No charges for South Carolina police officer who killed Zachary Hammond

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A Seneca, South Carolina police officer will not face criminal charges for the brutal killing of unarmed 19-year-old Zachary Hammond on July 26.

Hammond drove a date to McDonald's to get ice cream that evening and then to Hardee's for a hamburger. Seneca police were there waiting after an undercover officer arranged a small-scale drug deal with Hammond's passenger, Tori Morton.

Morton had allegedly used Hammond's phone to accidentally text a state trooper, whose number was one digit different from the person whom she was trying to reach. The state trooper set up a meeting to purchase marijuana and cocaine in the parking lot of the Hardee's restaurant. Upon their arrival, Hammond and Morton parked next to the undercover police officer, and Morton texted the officer, "i think im beside u lol."

Video from Lieutenant Officer Mark Tiller's dashboard camera, released yesterday, shows Tiller speeding into the parking lot of Hardee's, after being radioed by the undercover officer. Hammond is seen beginning to reverse. Tiller then exits his car and approaches Hammond's driver's side, ordering Hammond to stop and put his hands up. Hammond continues to drive on, moving past the officer. Tiller then fires his gun twice through Hammond's driver's side window. Tiller is later heard saying outside of the view of the camera, "He tried to hit me."

A private autopsy performed at the behest of Hammond's family found that he was shot in the side and back, meaning his car had already passed Tiller when the officer fired his gun and was therefore clearly not a threat.

In an email to the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division, Solicitor Chrissy Adams sought to blame

Hammond for his own death. "Zachary Hammond failed to comply with Lt. Tiller's orders and as a result he lost his life. When Hammond made the conscious decision to flee a lawful stop he set in motion this tragic chain of events."

A court filing by Hammond's family against the City of Seneca Police Department states that before he shot Hammond, Tiller shouted, "I'll blow your f\*\*\*ing head off." The filing further asserts, "Zachary's body was left uncovered and unprotected on the ground for almost ninety minutes to be ravaged by ants while the crime scene was being processed. As other Seneca Police Department officers arrived, they either consoled Lt. Tiller or celebrated with him. Officer Anthony Moon, and perhaps others, raised Zachary's lifeless hand and gave Zachary's dead body a celebratory 'high five'."

The video and the autopsy findings clearly contradict Tiller's claim, endorsed by Adams, that his life was in danger. "In order to stop the continuing threat to himself and the general public," Tiller's legal counsel has claimed, "two shots were fired by Lieutenant Tiller in quick succession. If not for Lieutenant Tiller's quick reflexes and his ability to push off of the car, Lieutenant Tiller would have easily been run over by Mr. Hammond."

Hammond family lawyer Eric Bland said in a statement that Hammond posed no risk to the public, "other than a possible minor possession of marijuana." Bland added, "There was no warrant for his arrest. There was no APB for him or his car. There was no murder or life that was in danger if shots were not fired and the automobile continued on to leave Hardee's. There was no AMBER alert. There was no ticking

bomb situation. This is clearly made up. It is ridiculous.”

Prior to her decision, the Hammond family attempted to remove Adams from the investigation. “We’re in the process of sending her [Adams] a formal letter and asking her to resign and the attorney general take over,” Bland told *The Greenville News*. “I can’t tell you why, but she has taken some actions that clearly show that she is not going to charge this officer and that she is spending her time trying to sully Zachary. She cannot be considered objective anymore, from some of the things that she has said.”

In a desperate attempt to whitewash Tiller’s killing, Adams found it necessary to report that the 19-year-old Hammond had recently gotten the word “outlaw” tattooed on one of his arms. She went on to say Hammond’s text message history, none of which Tiller had seen prior to shooting him, proved that Hammond “had no intention of stopping for law enforcement.”

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## **Video shows South Carolina police officer attacking student in classroom**

In a separate incident, cell phone video shows a South Carolina police officer, Ben Fields, violently attacking and throwing to the ground a student at Spring Valley High School in Columbia. The incident happened on Monday.

Fields has been placed on paid administrative leave pending an investigation by the police. On Tuesday, the US Justice Department announced that it would be launching a civil rights investigation into the students’ arrest, a tactic that has been used on a number of occasions with the aim of containing public outrage over police brutality.

According to fellow students, Fields had been called to the classroom after the student refused to turn over her cell phone to a teacher. The student was arrested for “disturbing school.”

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