

Cook County, Illinois refuses to charge officer involved in fatal shooting of two

George Marlowe
13 February 2017

Last Friday, the Cook County State Attorney's Office refused to bring charges against Chicago Police Department (CPD) officer Robert Rialmo involved in a double-fatal shooting. In what amounts to yet another cover up of systemic Chicago police violence, the prosecutors claimed that the officer acted in self-defense and that there was "insufficient evidence" to bring charges, despite witnesses suggesting otherwise.

Officer Rialmo shot and killed 19-year-old Quintonio LeGrier and bystander 55-year-old Betty Jones in December of 2015. Rialmo responded to a domestic disturbance call from the LeGrier household. Antonio LeGrier, Quintonio's father, said that his son was having emotional troubles and was taking medication for mental illness. LeGrier called 911 three times to ask the police to intervene before he was shot.

The officer claimed that LeGrier charged at him with a baseball bat when he shot at him in self-defense. But witnesses at the scene, including LeGrier's father, pointed out that he was at least 15 to 20 feet away from LeGrier before he shot at him multiple times.

According to Larry Rogers Jr., the attorney representing the Jones family, "There is absolutely no justification for the use of excessive force in that instance. Bettie Jones was at her home. She was in her house. She was doing everything right that day. To suggest this is a justifiable shooting is to ignore the objective evidence."

Shell casings found on the sidewalk also provide physical evidence to corroborate the witnesses' statements that the officer was not in close proximity to either Jones or LeGrier. Jones, a workers rights activist opposed to police brutality, was a bystander when she was shot in the chest and died later.

The families of both Jones and LeGrier expressed outrage and disappointment at the decision. "We will

not stop fighting for justice," said Latisha Jones, one of Bettie Jones' children, to the press. The Jones family continues to have a pending lawsuit against the city and Rialmo. LeGrier's mother Janet Cooksey said, "As far as what happened today, I just don't understand. Quintonio did the right thing. He called for help."

Notably, when the family of LeGrier sought a wrongful death lawsuit over the killing of their son, the officer responded last year with a countersuit against the family estate for more than \$10 million. Rialmo cited "emotional trauma" from the young man's actions. Despite the CPD claiming they had no official role in the officer's countersuit, the underlying logic of the highly unusual response was to try to intimidate anyone suing police officers for their brutality or violence.

The lawyers of the LeGrier family saw this as a clear sign that that the officers and the CPD were attempting to deflect blame from the police killing to the victims. For his part, Rialmo's attorney issued a statement in which he feigned sympathy for his victims and claimed no wrongdoing.

The decision by the State Attorney's prosecutors to pass on charges against Rialmo follows up on a scathing report brought by the US Department of Justice (DOJ) against the CPD for systematic and unconstitutional practices of police violence and brutality. The report highlighted brutal practices used by the CPD, including the use of deadly force and highly militarized police responses to minor incidents. The report noted that CPD officers terrorized working-class neighborhoods and used all kinds of racist language and profiling against minority youth, many of whom complained that they felt they were living in "open-air" prisons.

The city of Chicago has a long history of police

torture and violence against broad sections of the working class and the most vulnerable in the city. The killing of LeGrier and Jones happened right after the release of the video of the police killing of Laquan McDonald in 2015. The release of the video highlighted the cover up by all layers of the political establishment, involving the Democratic Mayor Rahm Emanuel, as well as the City Council.

State's Attorney Kim Foxx recused herself from this case, as her former Chicago law firm was representing the Jones family. Foxx replaced incumbent Anita Alvarez, who was criticized for her failure to bring charges against the officer that killed McDonald, and for her part in the cover up. Alvarez was known to have close relations with CPD herself. Foxx, for her part, was elected on the promise that she would "reform" the police department, but has largely followed in her predecessor's footsteps.

Moreover, despite the DOJ report and its toothless recommendations, little has been implemented under the fraudulent banner of "reform" to change the police reign of terror in Chicago, as in most parts of the country where the police continue to kill with impunity. Such reports from the Justice Department, despite their horrific revelations, are part of the effort of the entire political establishment to try and cover up the crimes of the state against the population.

The response by the political establishment, Democrats and Republicans alike, has not been to "reform" the police or to end police violence. Far from dealing with the social crisis—with many parts of the city of Chicago ravaged by high degrees of poverty, unemployment and social breakdown, including a relative rise in violence—the political establishment has sought to dramatically strengthen the repressive apparatus of the state with more law-and-order measures and proposals.

Emanuel, for his part, recently bragged about the high volume of police applicants, as part of his efforts to increase the numbers of police forces on the streets. Building on the repressive framework established by the Obama administration in largely defending police violence around the country, the Trump administration has made insinuations that it will "send in the Feds" to deal with the social crisis in Chicago.

Meanwhile, police violence continues in Chicago. Last week, an Amtrak police officer shot and killed a

Minneapolis man who was traveling back to Minnesota after a funeral. Chad Robertson, 25, was shot by the officer and is in critical condition. While law enforcement sources suggest that Amtrak officers were responding to a potential robbery, Robertson's family says he was shot for no reason.

Also last Friday, CPD officers shot a 55-year-old woman, Michelle Robey, in the North Side of Chicago near a CVS pharmacy. CPD spokesperson Anthony Guglielmi claim that it was a "suicide by cop" and that she was allegedly brandishing a knife when officers confronted her. Officers responded by using a Taser on the woman before finally shooting and killing her. It seems likely that Robey suffered from severe mental illness.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact