

Detroit Police stonewall investigation into Taser death of 15-year-old

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Detroit police have yet to release any information on their investigation into the death of 15-year-old Damon Grimes at the hands of a Michigan State Police trooper August 26. The Michigan State Police are conducting a separate investigation.

The youth was killed while riding his ATV in a working class neighborhood on Detroit's east side along the Gratiot Avenue corridor. The trooper fired a Taser at Grimes from his moving patrol car, causing the teen to crash into a parked pick-up truck, killing him.

On August 30, a vigil held for the slain teen attended by some 200 people gave way to expressions of tension and anger over the callous killing of an unarmed youth. About 20 youth riding ATVs participated in the protest, which involved a brief confrontation with police. No arrests were made.

According to an account in the local media, "Michigan State Police said troopers had tried to stop Grimes, 15, for reckless driving," but the teen fled on the ATV. Troopers pursued and one of them used a Taser on Grimes, striking him. He then crashed.

It was later revealed that the state police trooper in question, who was identified by a police source as Mark Bessner, had been previously accused of excessive force in two separate lawsuits that were later dismissed. Bessner has been temporarily suspended.

State Police Lt. Michael Shaw reported to Mlive that the trooper involved in the death is being placed on paid suspension while the investigation is conducted. A spokesperson for the Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office, Lisa Croff, reported to the *Detroit News* that the death had been ruled accidental.

"He died in an accident (which caused) blunt force head trauma," said Croff, stressing the ruling has nothing to do with the police investigation into the incident. "The manner of death is that he crashed an

ATV in an accident. We're not saying why the accident happened; that's not for us to say."

However, the cause of Grimes' death is self-evident. The officer fired a Taser at someone operating a moving vehicle, which either directly caused heart failure or caused the youth to lose control of the vehicle.

It should be noted that riding ATVs is a popular pastime on Detroit's east side and in the metropolitan area as a whole. Although technically illegal to ride on city roads, it is outrageous that a misdemeanor should lead to what amounts to an extra-judicial execution.

Dezajanai, a 17-year-old youth involved in the vigil, told the *Detroit News* it was normal for people in Detroit's east side neighborhoods to ride ATVs in the street and that she used to ride her ATV with Damon all the time.

"We're here tonight for him. To send him off right," said Dezajanai. "This is my ATV, he just got his a month ago."

According to records reviewed by the *Detroit News*, Bessner and other state troopers were sued in a 2013 federal case in which the lawsuit claimed that Bessner and a group of other troopers "spotted Martin McCurtis outside Sinai-Grace Hospital's emergency room and attacked him for no reason."

The *News* account continued, citing the lawsuit, "Bessner repeatedly struck the plaintiff's body and gratuitously kned him in his face and head multiple times as plaintiff was lying defenseless on the ground. The other defendants joined in the unprovoked physical assault of plaintiff." In addition, the federal suit goes on to say that police sought a warrant against the man for resisting and obstructing a police office. This request was refused by the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office. The case was later settled by an agreement between the

parties involved.

In a second case, Bessner allegedly Tasered the plaintiff on “multiple and continuous occasions with the specific intent of inflicting pain,” including after the plaintiff was in handcuffs.

The family of Damon Grimes has filed a \$50 million dollar lawsuit against Bessner for their son’s death. The family’s attorney, Geoffrey Fieger, told the press. “I cannot conceive, under any set of circumstances, a justification for a police officer doing a drive-by shooting of a child on an ATV.” He continued, “Under no circumstance should any police officer ever shoot like a cowboy out of his vehicle.”

The death of Damon Grimes is yet another appalling example of police violence, and among the most recent in a continuing series of extrajudicial killings by the police in American cities. As of the time of this writing, Killedbypolice.net reports that there have been 826 deaths at the hands of police since the start of 2017.



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