Murder charges filed against East Pittsburgh police officer in shooting death of teenager

Samuel Davidson
28 June 2018

Murder charges have been filed against the East Pittsburgh police officer who shot and killed unarmed 17-year-old Woodland Hills High School student Antwon Rose, Jr. last week as he ran from a car he was riding in after it was pulled over by police.

Michael Rosfeld, 30, has been charged with one count of criminal homicide Wednesday, more than a week after he gunned down Rose. He was released from jail a few hours afterward on a $250,000 unsecured bond, meaning he did not have to pay any money to get out. An initial hearing is set for July 6.

A cell phone video of the shooting captured by a neighbor shows Rosfeld firing three shots within seconds as Rose and another youth tried to run away. All three shots hit Rose in the back. At no time did Rosfeld instruct Antwon to stop running or fire a warning shot.

Rosfeld, who has been on paid leave since the shooting, had only been hired by the East Pittsburgh police department a few weeks earlier and was sworn in less than two hours before murdering Antwon.

At a press conference following the indictment, Allegheny County District Attorney Stephen Zappala described the shooting as "an intentional act and there's no justification for it. You do not shoot somebody in the back if they are not a threat to you."

Rose's family correctly greeted the announcement of charges filed against Rosfeld with "guarded optimism." According to a statement released by their attorneys, the family noted that "there is a long road ahead to a conviction and proper sentencing which is the only thing we will accept as justice."

In the overwhelming majority of police killings, of which there are more than one thousand every year, no officer is ever charged. In the few cases where charges are brought, most are found not guilty. The Supreme Court has made it nearly impossible to convict a police officer for murder stating that an officer is permitted to use deadly force as long as he or she believes that either they or others are in danger.

Zappala's indictment of Rosfeld has nothing to do with seeking a criminal conviction. Zappala delayed bringing charges for more than a week and the first official interview with Rosfeld was only held by the Allegheny County Police department Friday, three full days after the shooting, giving Rosfeld plenty of time to concoct a more favorable account of the killing.

On Tuesday, the day before the indictment, Pittsburgh Mayor William Peduto announced that he was pressing for an indictment of Rosfeld.

What concerns Zappala and Peduto is the growing movement of workers and youth throughout the area who have been expressing outrage over the killing. They hope that with an indictment followed by a drawn-out court process that popular opposition to police violence will decline.

Rosfeld arrest follows a week of daily and growing protests by hundreds of residents throughout the area. Many demonstrations have involved acts of civil disobedience including blocking traffic during rush hour and sporting events. Workers and youth who have taken part in the protests have been motivated by the continuing wave of police violence throughout the country as well as the attack on immigrants and growing inequality.

On Sunday more than 1,400 Pittsburgh area residents attended the viewing for Antwon paying their respects to the family and expressing their grief and outrage over yet another young man losing his life at the hands of the police.

Dale, a family member who spoke to the World Socialist Web Site prior to the charges being filed

© World Socialist Web Site

against Rosfeld said, “Antwon was such a good kid. He was taking AP classes, all his teachers liked him, everyone liked him. All his teachers came today, all his friends from school came. 1,400 people came that is how much he was loved.”

Referring to the fact that the officer who shot Antwon had not yet been arrested, Dale said, “the question I want answered is why is Zappala giving him a 10-day head start?

“If it was the other way around, I’d be in jail. Why give him a head start. He could be halfway around the world. If situation turned around, and Antwon shot the police office, he would be in jail right now. They would be grilling him night and day. Why isn’t this man in jail right now?”

A friend of Rose’s who attended the Sunday viewing, said, “He was a really nice guy, he worked hard and was friendly to everyone. It is so wrong that the police shot him in the back. He wasn’t a treat, he was scared and ran. He was probably worried that if he got in trouble it would hurt his future. The police treat kids as criminals, but we are people.”

On Monday, hundreds of people attend his funeral which was held in one of the Woodland Hills School District’s buildings with many of Antown’s friends and teachers speaking about his life and the impact that he had on them.

On Tuesday protest resumed with nearly a thousand people marching through downtown Pittsburgh demanding justice.

In the week since Rose’s murder at least 13 people have fallen victim to police shootings, according to a database maintained by the *Washington Post*. So far this year 504 people have been shot and killed by police; the vast majority, 477, are men. The greatest number of victims are white (193), followed by black (92), and Hispanic (52). Fifteen are listed as Other and 152 as unknown.

As in the case of Antwon Rose, 28 victims were unarmed and 178 were shot while they ran away from the police.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site