

Massive police presence for trial of cop in murder of Antwon Rose

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A massive show of police force is taking place for the trial of former East Pittsburgh police officer Michael Rosfeld, who shot 17-year-old Woodland High School honor student Antwon Rose three times in the back last year, killing him.

Antwon was shot and killed on June 19, 2018 as he and another youth ran away from the car they were riding in, after Rosfeld pulled over the car and ordered the driver out.

The streets around the courthouse building have been blocked with dump trucks filled with gravel and the sidewalks have been barricaded, as police in full riot gear patrol the area. Reinforcements and SWAT teams are on standby.

The massive police presence is designed to intimidate protesters from showing up outside the court building. The murder of Antwon provoked weeks of protests over the summer, and city and county officials want to use a show of force to frighten people away from renewing their protests.

The police are very fearful of the anger that is growing over the increasing number of police killings throughout the country. In the few cases where police officers are brought to trial, the vast majority are acquitted.

Earlier this month, officials announced that no charges would be filed against the two police officers who shot and killed Stephon Clark in Sacramento, California while he held a cell phone in his grandmother's backyard.

The police presence in Pittsburgh is in sharp contrast to the treatment of two rallies held in December in which about 150 heavily armed supporters of gun rights were allowed to carry multiple weapons, including fully loaded AR-15 and automatic handguns, throughout the downtown area of the city, including on

the steps of the same courthouse and City-County building.

No attempt was made to prevent that rally, which included many members of far-right white supremacists and neo-Nazi groups. Police stood by, only posting signs stating that the protesters could not bring their guns into the county buildings.

The massive police buildup also serves another purpose. It is an attempt to influence the jury to side with Rosfeld. "Look at how dangerous things are. Police are under attack and always fear for their lives," is the message sent to jurors by the presence of barricades and police.

As in other cases of police killings of innocent workers and youth, Rosfeld is seeking to defend his murder of Antwon with the claim that it was self-defense.

On the first day of testimony, Lashaun Livingston testified that she began taking a cell phone video a few moments before Rosfeld fired the fatal shots that killed Antwon.

Explaining that she started taking the video when she heard Rosfeld shouting, Ms. Livingston said, "That type of tone frightened me, myself...An angry tone—harsh. It was more so angry—that he was mad at someone or something. I had a bad feeling."

Ms. Livingston explained that at no time did she see Antwon point a gun or any object at Rosfeld. Her video, which has been seen by tens of thousands, does not even show the youth turning around as he attempted to flee down along the side of a home.

Another witness testified that she was on her porch at the time of the shooting and that she saw Antwon and another boy, later identified as Zaijuan Hester, run from the car.

"Automatically, 'Boom, boom, boom!' Three shots,"

Debra Jones said. “The police officer shot three times. I said, ‘You shot them boys for running.’”

The judge, Allegheny County Common Pleas Judge Alexander P. Bicket, has issued a number of rulings that are clearly intended to favor Rosfeld. First Bicket decided to bring in a jury from Central Pennsylvania rather than take a jury from the Pittsburgh area. That jury was picked and bused to Pittsburgh on Monday. The jurors have to pass the massive police presence every time they enter and leave the courthouse.

On Monday, during a hearing on a series of motions, Bicket ruled that Rosfeld’s attorney may tell the jury about a drive-by shooting that took place in a neighboring town 13 minutes before Antwon was killed.

On Friday, Zaijuan Hester pleaded guilty to aggravated assault in that case. A video of that shooting shows Hester rolled down his back-seat window and fired shots out of the moving car.

Antwon was the front seat passenger in the car and he never rolled down his window or fired any shots. The District Attorney stated that Antwon did not do anything to further that crime.

Rosfeld’s attorneys want to introduce the video into the trial in the hope it will show that Rosfeld feared for his life when he shot Antwon in the back.

Bicket has not yet ruled on other motions made by Rosfeld’s attorneys, including allowing them to bring up the charge that Antwon participated in an armed robbery five hours earlier, or that prosecutors can only seek a first-degree conviction instead of lesser charges. First-degree murder is much more difficult to prove, since jurors must find that Rosfeld acted with premeditation.

Antwon’s family has received growing support from people throughout the area as well as nationally, from a group of mothers whose children have been killed by the police. Michelle Kenney, Antwon’s mother, has told reporters that she has talked frequently with Samaria Rice, the mother of 12-year-old Tamir Rice of Cleveland, who was shot and killed by police as he played with a toy gun in a park.



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