

Settlement reached in lawsuit against Detroit killer cops in Damon Grimes case

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7 January 2020

The family of Damon Grimes, a Detroit teen killed in 2017 by Michigan State Police (MSP), reached a \$12 million settlement last month in a civil suit against troopers Mark Bessner, Ethan Berger and Jacob Liss.

Grimes was killed in August of 2017 in a high-profile act of police brutality. He was riding his ATV around his neighborhood when Bessner fired a taser at him from their moving police vehicle, causing Grimes to lose control and crash into a parked vehicle at between 35-40 miles per hour, killing him. He was 15 years old.

Liss, Bessner's partner, and fellow trooper Berger helped cover up the killing afterward, according to a police internal affairs report. Both were later subjected to disciplinary actions by MSP, but neither were charged as accessories to the crime. Bessner was charged and convicted earlier last year of involuntary manslaughter and sentenced to up to 15 years in prison.

Bessner had a history of violence prior to the killing and was the target of two separate use-of-force lawsuits which were later dismissed. One alleged that Bessner and several other troopers attacked someone "for no reason" as they left the hospital. "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," according to the suit.

In the other suit, Bessner is alleged to have tasered a suspect on "multiple and continuous occasions with the specific intent of inflicting pain," including after the victim was in handcuffs.

A spokeswoman for MSP released a hypocritical and self-serving statement which read, "Damon Grimes' death is a tragedy that could have been avoided if not for the criminal and unforgivable actions of a former MSP trooper.

"The MSP recognizes that while this monetary settlement does not change how this has affected the

Grimes family, it may help to begin to bring some closure. The MSP sincerely apologizes to everyone impacted by this senseless act and we have prioritized working with our troopers and the community to avoid this from happening again."

Grimes was one of 1,147 people nationwide killed by police in 2017, according to killedbypolice.net, a community-run database. At least 14 people were killed in the state of Michigan, including nine in metro Detroit.

At one point, Bessner was one of four Detroit-area cops awaiting trial simultaneously for separate incidences of police brutality. However, charges against police officers in such cases are the exception. Only 80 officers were charged for on-duty killings between 2005 and April 2017, according to a 2017 CNN report.

According to a separate count by the *Washington Post*, 931 people were killed by police in the US in 2019. However, it is likely that this is an undercount due to cover-ups which claim police killings as drug overdoses, suicides, or deaths from "natural causes" or "excited delirium."

The settlement in the Grimes case comes in the aftermath of a string of high-profile developments nationwide. In October 2019, a video leaked online of the murder of 16-year-old Isiah Murrietta-Golding in Fresno, California in April of 2017 who was fatally shot in the head after jumping a fence and walking across a schoolyard away from police.

The officers involved in the killing filed reports stating that Murrietta-Golding had "reached into his waistband several times," prompting them to use "self-defense" against the teen.

New York City Police killed five people in the month of October 2019 alone. NYPD Chief Kevin Maloney responded cynically: "It's high in the last couple of

weeks, but it's part of where we've been consistent in the last couple of years."

While a disproportionate number of those killed by police are black, a plurality are white, and almost all are poor. It is class, not race, which is the primary "risk factor" for victims of police killings.

The viciousness with which police regularly murder is a symptom of a much deeper crisis in American society. The epidemic of police murders are the direct product of the bolstering of police forces by the entire political establishment in order to deploy them against an increasingly restive working class. The Obama administration funneled billions of dollars in surplus military equipment, through the infamous 1033 program, to local law enforcement. The assault rifles, snipers and armored vehicles acquired through this program were deployed in 2014 and 2015 against protesters in St. Louis and Baltimore demonstrating against the police murders of Michael Brown and Freddie Gray.

With the election of Trump, the ruling elite's bolstering of police has taken on an overtly fascistic form. Trump resumed the 1033 program, which had been suspended since 2015 by Obama, shortly after taking office. Trump is deliberately seeking to build a base of support for himself among right-wing and fascist-minded police officers. Speaking to the annual convention of the International Association of Chiefs of Police in Chicago last October, Trump condemned the "political left" and immigrants including "radical politicians and prosecutors who refuse to enforce the law" and those who "open borders and sanctuary cities."

In his particularly right-wing rant Trump declared, "We face an onslaught from far-left activists who want to erase America's borders and nullify our federal laws. This includes activist judges." He also stated that he had recently given police departments around the US \$600 million in surplus military equipment.

This is a clear indication that the support coming directly from the White House and the state as a whole are laying the groundwork for violent crackdowns on the working class more broadly. There can be no doubt that mass violence by militarized police forces will be deployed against anti-war protesters in the event of a war with Iran.



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