Special prosecutor appointed in the case of Hannah Fizer, unarmed Missouri woman slain by police

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Ten weeks have passed since 25-year-old Hannah Fizer of Sedalia, Missouri, located 90 miles east of Kansas City, was murdered by a still publicly unnamed Pettis County deputy while on her way to work. Her killer, believed to be Pettis County Deputy Jordan Daniel Shutte, has yet to be charged with a crime and as of this writing is still on paid leave with the department.

Fizer, who was white, was on her way to work at the Eagle Stop gas station where she had recently been promoted to assistant manager when she was pulled over shortly after 10 p.m. on June 13 for allegedly speeding and "imprudent driving." Fizer was dead within 10 minutes. The deputy claimed Fizer was "non-compliant" and allegedly professed to having a gun, prompting the deputy to shoot the young woman five times.

Contrary to the police account of an aggressive criminal looking for a fight, family and friends describe Fizer as an easy-going, loving person, who in the words of her father, John, "wouldn't hurt a frog." Throughout the preliminary stages of the investigation, the family denied that Fizer owned or carried a firearm, and after three days, investigators were forced to admit that no weapon had been recovered in Fizer's vehicle, and the only spent shell casings recovered were from the deputy's weapon.

Following Fizer's slaying, the Missouri State Highway Patrol (MSHP) immediately took over the investigation from the county in an attempt to defuse simmering anger in the community. Demonstrations and weekly marches led by Fizer's family and friends have been held in the rural town with a population of roughly 20,000. The weekly marches, numbering as many as 100 people, have been populated with signs demanding, "Justice For Hannah," "We're not going away," and "#SayHerName, No Justice No Peace."

Since the beginning of the investigation, Pettis County Sheriff Kevin Bond has refused repeated requests from the family to name the deputy responsible for killing Fizer while at the same time threatening the population of Pettis County that he will "do everything in my power" to "quell assaults, riots ... and insurrections." The family reports that they have not been given any updates about the investigation from police since her death on June 13.

Speaking to the *New York Times*, Amy Fizer, Hannah's mother, remarked on the class justice her family has been subjected to and lack of information the family has received so far, noting, "It's like pulling teeth." Commenting on the freedom police have to harass, intimidate, and kill workers like her daughter, Amy Fizer bluntly stated, "They pull you over. They do what they want, when they want."

On June 23, the MSHP released information stating that they had obtained video from a nearby restaurant that recorded the entire incident, but they have yet to release it to the public. The *Kansas City Star*, which has not seen the video, reported that Fizer can be seen "moving in her car" before the deputy fired his weapon into the vehicle. Multiple bullet holes were located in the driver-side door and window of the vehicle, while Fizer "appeared to" have suffered "multiple gunshot wounds."

MSHP investigators also revealed that Fizer was recording the traffic stop with her cell phone which was found on the floor of the car. The cell phone has been in state custody since the night of the shooting.

Bond has confirmed that neither his deputy, nor the patrol car, were equipped with cameras, which the department had received three years ago. In a recorded interview with the *Kansas City Star*, Bond blamed "data failure" and "technical details," which allegedly prevented the equipment from working.

While Bond has purposely withheld information

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regarding the deputy who killed Fizer, he appeared in a local news segment in the first week of August to detail charges his department had filed against a young African American man for allegedly following an off-duty Pettis County deputy and asking him, “You like killing people?”

The alleged incident took place during the third week of June. However, Bond purposely waited until after a special prosecutor had been announced in the Fizer case weeks later to publicly name the accused and scold members of the community for attempting to discern the name of the killer cop in their midst, telling *KCTV* it creates a “very dangerous situation.” The young man was able to post a $10,000 surety bond after being charged with felony harassment.

Within a week of the story airing, the Kansas City Council voted on August 13, 7-5 to criminalize “doxxing” or the sharing of personal information online of police and public officials. The measure, as originally introduced by Democratic Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas, would have only protected state officials. However, after objections from the American Civil Liberties Union of Missouri that it prioritized state officials over the public, it was amended to include the public as well.

MSHP’s investigation into Fizer’s killing was completed on July 30, with the results turned over to the Pettis County Prosecutor’s Office and prosecutor Phillip Sawyer. Besides the aforementioned details, no other findings from the MSHP investigation have been made public or shared with the family as of this writing.

Upon receiving the Highway Patrol’s report, Sawyer waited approximately a week before issuing a public statement on August 4, announcing that he would be turning the case over to General Counsel for Missouri Office of Prosecution Services Stephen Sokoloff.

Attempting to provide the veneer of accountability to the cover-up in progress, Sawyer wrote that his decision to turn over the investigation to Sokoloff was made so that the “families of those involved” have the “confidence...that this matter was handled independently and competently by an individual with no ties to the jurisdiction that I serve.”

Similar to the appointment of a special prosecutor in the case of slain Louisville nurse Breonna Taylor, which occurred over 100 days ago, this tactic is commonly used by the state to delay inconvenient findings and protect killer cops.

Prior to being promoted to general counsel in February 2017, Sokoloff was the Deputy Director of the Missouri Department of Public Safety, where his duties included serving as the acting State Homeland Security Coordinator and on the Department of Homeland Security Identification and Credentials Management Committee. A Democrat, Sokoloff was prosecuting attorney of Dunklin County, Missouri from 1990 through 2014.

In a possible preview of the justice the Fizer family can expect to receive from Sokoloff’s offices, on February 24 of this year, Sokoloff found that a Fulton Police Department officer was justified in the shooting and killing of unarmed 25-year-old Cody McCaulou, which took place on December 30, 2019.

McCaulou, a young father, who was white, was shot multiple times after the officer approached his vehicle with his gun drawn after receiving an anonymous report that the vehicle and occupants inside were attempting to purchase drugs. McCaulou, with his girlfriend and mother in the vehicle, attempted to drive away, triggering the officer to unload on the car with his weapon, shooting McCaulou multiple times through the windshield and causing the vehicle to crash into a nearby building.

The entire incident took less than four seconds and no one except McCaulou was injured. While Sokoloff admitted it was “hard to get a good assessment of the speed” of the vehicle at the time the officer fired his weapon, Sokoloff wrote in his report that the vehicle was “accelerating rapidly towards him [the cop],” and that he felt the “officer had a reasonable belief that he was in danger of serious...injury or death.”

Michael Netherton, Sr., McCaulou’s father, disagreed with Sokoloff's opinion, telling *KIMZ*, “(The officer) had different options. He really did.” Netherton added that “the car wasn’t speeding or nothing.”

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