

Former Arkansas county sheriff's deputy charged with manslaughter in death of Hunter Brittain, released on bond

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On September 17, attorney Jeff Phillips of the 5th Judicial District, named Special Prosecutor for the case in July, announced during a news conference at the Pope County Courthouse in Russellville, Arkansas that former Lonoke County Sheriff's Deputy Michael Davis had been charged with felony manslaughter in the June 23 traffic stop shooting death of 17-year-old Hunter Brittain. The former deputy subsequently surrendered to state police agents, and on September 20 he appeared at the Lonoke County Sheriff's Office where bond was set at \$15,000. Shortly after the hearing concluded, Davis was out on bond.

The warrant for Davis's arrest was issued by First Division Circuit Court Judge Barbara Elmore of the 23rd Judicial District the same morning of the affidavit. A summary of the affidavit was read by attorney Phillips at the news conference, which established a timeline leading up to the shooting and its aftermath.

In the early morning hours of Wednesday, June 23, Davis initiated a traffic stop after seeing a white GMC pick-up truck smoking, whereupon Brittain immediately exited his vehicle, moved to the rear of his vehicle, as it was rolling backwards towards the front of Davis's patrol vehicle, to reach into the bed of the truck to retrieve a bright blue anti-freeze container. However, Davis, after allegedly issuing commands, fired one round, piercing Brittain's arm and striking him in the lower-right neck. The teenager then fell to the ground face down. Davis radioed dispatch that shots had been fired and requested assistance.

As back-up arrived, the passenger, Jordan King, was detained by a second deputy. After placing King in custody, Davis and the deputy cleared Brittain's truck. King explained that the second police officer that

arrived at the scene detained him: "[The officer] told me get out with my hands up and pull my shirt up and stuff, and then [forced] me to the ground, put me in handcuffs and was dragging me around and stuff. I sat in the back of the cop car for about three hours."

After the officers cleared the truck, they proceeded to render aid to Brittain, according to the affidavit. Brittain was transported to Baptist Health Medical Center in North Little Rock by Metropolitan Emergency Medical Services. It was at the hospital that Brittain succumbed to his injuries.

Investigators reviewed Davis's body camera footage and determined that he had not activated his camera until after the shot was fired. During an interview with investigators, Davis said before he could put his vehicle in park after initiating the traffic stop, he heard the truck's engine rev up and begin to travel southbound in the northbound lane on Arkansas 89 but did not notify dispatch on the radio that he was in pursuit because he realized the truck was attempting to turn left into Mahoney's body shop. Davis claims before he could get his patrol vehicle into park, Brittain opened his door and quickly exited the vehicle.

The affidavit continues with Davis observing Brittain slipping on gravel as he was rushing towards the rear of the truck. Davis, despite his initial realizations of a smoking truck turning into a body shop, "issued several commands" to Brittain to "show your hands" and "get back in the truck," despite noticing the truck rolling backwards.

Phillips mentioned during the interview, "Davis was asked to clarify if he could see Brittain's hands or see what was in Brittain's hands prior to discharging his county-issued firearm. Davis replied he could not see

Brittain's hands, nor what was in his hand prior to discharging his county-issued firearm." Since the beginning of the incident, Phillips continued, "There was no evidence of firearms located in or around Brittain's truck and never has been since the investigation."

King was with Brittain and another friend working on Brittain's truck. As King and Brittain went on a test drive in the truck, they made a right turn onto Highway 89 from Mahoney's body shop, travelling approximately one mile up the road to a church and turned around. King noticed that a patrol vehicle began to follow them, whereupon the deputy pulled them over just before the Mahoney's body shop driveway.

According to King, Brittain slowed down, put his turn signal on, and pulled to the left side of the road. King mentioned that as they were getting pulled over, they were laughing, finding it comical that the truck was smoking. As Brittain pulled into the parking lot of Mahoney's, both Brittain and King opened their doors to let the smoke out. King said that Brittain immediately stepped out of the truck, rushed to the rear of the truck, whereupon King heard a gunshot. King said, contrary to the officer's testimony, that he never heard anyone say, "show me your hands," or anything similar prior to the shooting.

Davis was charged with manslaughter; to be convicted, a jury must find that he recklessly caused Brittain's death. A conviction on the charge carries a sentence of a minimum of three years to a maximum of 10 years in prison.

On June 30, the families of Marquis Martin and Hunter Brittain rallied at the state capital in Little Rock demanding justice be administered for both victims. Martin, a 26-year-old black man, was found dead in a creek with a gunshot wound to his head in March 2020. Martin's mother, Lakisha Williams, said she understands what the Brittain family was going through. "We share so much of the same story with our loved one being taken by the gun and taken without justice." Jesse Brittain, Hunter's uncle, also spoke at the rally, saying, "I'd like to say to the black, white, brown communities around the country that it's time we unite and come together."

The families of Martin and Brittain were accompanied by attorneys Ben Crump and Devon Jacob. According to Crump, the families wanted to

know if Republican Governor Asa Hutchinson supported Hunter's Law—a proposed reform which would require law enforcement agencies in the state to provide police officers with body-mounted cameras while also requiring officers to activate their body-mounted cameras from the beginning of their shift to the end.

Media attention for Brittain's case has declined significantly since Democratic Party identity politics operative Reverend Al Sharpton spoke at Brittain's memorial service in July. Sharpton had cynically sought to use the police murder of a white teenager to marshal support for the Democrat's token George Floyd Act police reform bill in the Senate, which recently collapsed in negotiations. Forced, momentarily, to acknowledge the reality that police violence affects people of every race and ethnicity, Sharpton has moved on.

The police, recruited from the lower-middle class and most backward elements of the working class, are licensed killers who protect and enforce the property interests of the ruling class. Under conditions of insurmountable wealth inequality, the Democratic and Republican parties have increased funding for law enforcement, armed departments with military-grade weapons, and provided "training" for police forces which claim the lives of more than 1,000 people every year.

According to Statista.com, "the trend of fatal police shootings in the United States seems to only be increasing, with a total 604 civilians having been shot, 108 of whom were Black, in the first six months of 2021." According to MappingPoliceViolence.org, 745 people have been killed by police in the United States this year, of which 251 were white.



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