

Prosecutors shield police who killed eight-year-old Fanta Bility in Sharon Hill, Pennsylvania

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15 November 2021

Prosecutors are shielding police officers involved in two separate police killings in different parts of Pennsylvania.

On August 27, 8-year-old Fanta Bility was shot and killed by police as she and her family were walking home from a high school football game in Sharon Hill, a borough just outside Philadelphia.

On October 13, in Pittsburgh, a 54-year-old homeless man, Jim Rogers was brutalized and tased while being arrested. He died the following day.

In an unprecedented case, rather than charging the police who shot and killed 8-year-old Fanta Bility, the prosecutor has charged two teenagers who were involved in a fight after the game was over and more than a block away.

Sixteen-year-old Angelo Ford and 18-year-old Hasein Strand face first-degree murder, aggravated-assault and gun charges for the death of Fanta even though she along with her older sister and three others attending the football game were shot by police.

The three Sharon Hill, Pennsylvania police officers involved in the killing have not been charged.

According to Delaware County District Attorney Jack Stollsteimer, the two teenagers, not the police, are responsible for Fanta's death because they started the fight that led to the police opening fire into the crowd.

Ford and Strand were among hundreds of students and family attending a Sharon Hill High School football game on August 27. According to most accounts, the two teenagers had been exchanging words during the game and afterwards more than a block from the stadium got into a fight in which guns were fired.

The three Sharon Hill police officers were assigned to the football game. Without knowing where the shots came from, they opened fire at a car that was driving up the street in their direction. They shot some of the people in the car, but also missed the car and hit several of the people leaving the stadium including Fanta, killing her.

While ballistics tests prove conclusively that the bullet that killed Fanta and the bullets that injured her older sister and others in the crowd came from Sharon Hill police, none of

them have even been fired, let alone arrested. Even the identity of the officer who fired the fatal shot has not been released.

In charging the two teens, the District Attorney's office is seeking to shield and provide a ready-made defense for the police. According to First Assistant District Attorney Tanner Rouse, the legal basis for charging the two teens "is very simple." According to Tanner, since Ford and Strand were committing a crime, they were not only responsible for their actions, but for the actions taken by police some distance away.

According to such logic, the police who killed George Floyd on May 25, 2020 were not at fault since he was suspected of spending a counterfeit bill or the police who murdered Eric Garner July 17, 2014 could not be held accountable since he was suspected of selling single cigarettes from packs without tax stamps.

In fact, all police killings could be justified, since most of them involve police responding to a broken tail light or other minor traffic violation.

The Bility family's attorney, Bruce Castor, told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* that the family's attention remains focused on the cops who killed Bility.

"I want the focus to remain on the Sharon Hill police officers whose negligent and reckless behavior in reacting as they did is what killed Fanta Bility," said Castor, to the *Inquirer*. Castor has filed a civil lawsuit against the officers and the police department. "From the point of view of the Bility family, these officers killed Fanta, and they need to be held accountable for that, and those responsible for their supervision and training need to be held accountable for that."

The prosecution of Ford and Strand is especially brutal. As of late last week Ford, 16, is being held without bond and did not have an attorney. Strand was not yet in custody but also lacks the means to mount a proper defense. Since they are being charged with first-degree murder, if convicted they could face life without the possibility of parole.

More than 90 percent of cases in Pennsylvania never go to

trial. Prosecutors press the most extreme charges in order to pressure defendants, most who cannot afford expensive or any attorney, into accepting plea bargains with long jail sentences.

Meanwhile, in Pittsburgh, prosecutors have yet to file charges against the police officers who killed a homeless man on October 13.

Jim Rogers, a 54-year-old homeless man, was confronted by police while he was sitting on a porch after taking a test ride on a bike that was up for sale.

Neighbors who witnessed the murder in the Bloomfield neighborhood, stated that Rogers was non-confrontational with police who kept shouting louder and louder at him. They also said that it was clear that he was homeless and had mental health issues.

Cell phone video taken of the arrest shows Rogers sitting trying to talk with police when he was violently handcuffed and tased several times. Video shows police rolling Rogers across the street with their feet.

“He was just sitting there,” said one neighbor who asked not to be identified. “The cop would yell at him and he just said very calmly, ‘but I didn’t do anything.’”

“Next thing the cop teased him.”

Jesse Bunch tweeted: “Jim Rogers was tased by Pittsburgh Police after becoming ‘non-compliant.’ He later died in the hospital. The suspect kept saying just, ‘I didn’t do anything,’ and I guess he was trying to talk to the officer and the officer just wasn’t having it.”

Police claim that they were called to the scene for a report of a stolen bike. Police have not released the 911 call or the identity of the supposed caller.

The owner of the bike, Kathy Catania, said she would have given him the bike and that she just wanted to get rid of it.

“He rode the bike and placed it back in the yard,” a neighbor said. “I don’t even see the reason the police approached him. He was sitting on a porch. You could see that he had mental problems and was homeless.”

Police also prevented city paramedics from transporting Rogers to the hospital which was just four blocks away and instead placed him in a police car. Police took Rogers to another hospital and arrived nearly 40 minutes after the arrest. And while further away, Google Maps places the drive time at only 13 minutes.

Police claim that Rogers became unresponsive while in the police car and he was pronounced dead the following day.

The deaths of Bility and Rogers, who were both African American, also exposes the role of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests and the Democratic Party. While the death of George Floyd in 2020 rightly produced mass national and even international protests, the latest murders have only produced small local protests mainly made up of family,

friends, neighbors and supporters.

In the case of Bility, the Delaware County Black Caucus held a press conference calling for the three officers to be fired, but Pennsylvania State Senator Anthony Williams stressed that pressure should not be applied and the community members should place their faith in a grand jury investigation.

“If the grand jury is going to operate in secrecy and privacy to do their work, that means everyone should keep their nose, hands, opinions and pressure out of the DA’s office and away from the grand jury,” Williams told WPVI.

Pittsburgh Mayor-elect Ed Gainey told a local news station that he needed more information on what happened in Rogers’ case.

“I don’t know everything that’s happened, so it would be a little bit premature for me to speak what I don’t know, but I pray for that family,” Gainey told WTAE

Gainey will be Pittsburgh’s first black mayor when he takes office in January. He won the Democratic Party primary this past spring against incumbent William Peduto largely because of Peduto’s support for police during last year’s protests over the death of George Floyd and the rapid rise in housing prices which are pushing low-income and working class African American households out of the neighborhoods they live in.

The BLM movement has been a key prop for diverting the anger of millions of people both black and white to the ongoing acts of police brutality into racialists politics and into supporting the Democratic Party. Now that the Democrats control the White House and both houses of Congress, BLM has become relatively silent on the continuing issue of police killings, especially in locations where the Democrats control the local and state government.

In fact, Biden has made clear his support for the police and efforts to defund or reform police departments have largely been dropped. Under the Biden administration, police killings continue at the same rate as under the Trump administration. While the percentage of blacks killed is more than twice their proportion of the population, the majority of those killed are white. The most common factor is not race but class, with almost all those killed by the police are low-income and working class.



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