

Family of Wichita, Kansas teenager Cedric Lofton demands justice after his death in juvenile detention

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14 January 2022

An autopsy report released in December found 17-year-old Cedric Lofton of Wichita, Kansas, sustained life-threatening injuries after being arrested by Wichita police. The autopsy report firmly ruled the African American teenager's death as a homicide, contradicting previous reports.

Lofton was arrested on September 24, 2021, after his foster family called the police due to him exhibiting some "erratic and aggressive behaviors," resulting from a mental health episode.

According to the *New York Times*, Lofton was taken to a county juvenile center, where he allegedly "fought with correctional staff members, who placed shackles on his ankles, rolled him onto his abdomen and handcuffed his wrists behind his back," according to an autopsy report. "He appeared to calm down and made 'snoring sounds' but when staff members checked for a pulse four minutes later, they could not find one," the report added. Lofton died in the hospital two days later.

Chief Medical Examiner Timothy Gorrill, who performed the latest autopsy in December, did not mince words in his report. He wrote, "The manner of death is homicide." He noted that the teenager's death was the result of the way Lofton was put in a restrained position that caused an "anoxic brain injury," one resulting from the cutoff of oxygen to the brain.

Lofton's family and their attorney were given a private viewing of the videos showing the Wichita police encountering Lofton but the videos thus far have not been released to the public. Lofton's family attorney, civil rights attorney Andrew M. Stroth, said the video shows officers on top of the teen multiple times. "The injuries in the autopsy report are consistent with the video that shows the officers using excessive

force," Stroth said. "The officers took Cedric's breath away. Cedric Lofton could not breathe."

In spite of the clear report and video evidence from that day, District Attorney Marc Bennett in Sedgwick County is denying that the police had any culpability. According to WIBW, Bennett said that whether or not criminal charges can be brought is a legal determination to be made by the Office of the District Attorney, not by the coroner. He said intent cannot be determined by the coroner's report, dismissing the clear evidence presented by the report.

Community members have rejected the excuse-making coming from Bennett and have organized protests. The organizers and the family of Lofton have created an online petition and issued demands that include: an independent prosecutor for Lofton's case, from outside of the Sedgwick County District Attorney's Office; the release of the video from the Wichita Police Department and juvenile center from the night of the incident; and the release of the names of individuals involved in the events leading up to Lofton's death, including officers and corrections staff. Some local news outlets have referred to Lofton as the "Wichita George Floyd."

After the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, inspired mass multiracial protests against police violence in May 2020, the Democratic Party and pseudo-left have worked continuously to channel popular opposition to police violence into the divisive dead end of racist identity politics while promoting illusions that the police can be reformed. For instance, the George Floyd Justice and Policing Act, which included tepid reforms such as limiting qualified immunity, was dropped by the

Democrats after it failed to secure enough support to overcome a Republican filibuster in the Senate.

According to Mapping Police Violence, police killed 1,136 people in 2021, continuing the trend of police killing an average of three people every day.

While there is undoubtedly no shortage of racist cops, and those motivations may play a role in many killings and assaults, people of all backgrounds are subjected to police violence. The victims of the police are overwhelmingly poor and working class. As the crisis of capitalism intensifies, the ruling class will increasingly rely on police forces to repress social discontent or any working class movement that threatens its privileges.



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