

Philadelphia police fire officer who shot 12-year-old Thomas Siderio in the back

Harvey Simpkins
10 March 2022

On Tuesday, Philadelphia police announced the termination of the officer responsible for killing 12-year-old Thomas Siderio Jr. On March 1, Siderio was shot in the back as he ran away from two plainclothes police officers.

While police initially claimed that Siderio, who is white, was holding a gun when he was shot, police sources told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* that video from neighbors indicates that Siderio may have tossed a weapon and was therefore unarmed when the fatal shot was fired. The officers were not wearing body cameras, as, according to Philadelphia policy, only uniformed police wear them.

Police records obtained by the *Inquirer* report that on March 1, four undercover officers were in an unmarked car around 7:20 p.m. in South Philadelphia, allegedly staking out an area after a 17-year-old boy and 20-year-old man were seen on social media brandishing weapons.

Siderio and a 17-year-old boy were on bicycles when the plainclothes officers' unmarked car approached them. The officers say they turned on their flashing lights, heard gunfire, saw their back window shatter, and then two of them gave chase to the two boys, firing four shots at them as they fled.

At a March 8 press conference, Philadelphia Police Commissioner Danielle Outlaw said that the two officers, identified as Kwaku Sarpong and Edsaul Mendoza in police records, chased after Siderio, firing one shot each. According to Outlaw, while Sarpong "maintained cover," Mendoza continued to pursue the boy, firing two more shots, one of which fatally hit him in the upper right back, exiting through his left chest.

Kim Tomasetti, the mother of the 17-year-old who was with Siderio, disputed much of the official story. Her son told her the officers did not turn on their

emergency lights or identify themselves as police before firing shots at the two boys. Tomasetti added that the boys were afraid that someone in the car was about to attack them and had no idea they were police officers.

At the March 8 press conference, Outlaw announced the termination of Mendoza, although she refused to identify him by name, citing unspecified potential threats to his safety, and referring to him only as "officer number 1." Police sources, however, confirmed to the *Inquirer* that Mendoza was the officer who will be terminated.

"It was clear that the use-of-force policy was violated," Outlaw said. Under Philadelphia police policy, officers should not shoot at a fleeing suspect "who presents no immediate threat of death or serious bodily injury." She said it was "certain" that officer number 1 was the one who fired the shot that killed Siderio.

In 1985, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Tennessee v. Garner* that it violates the Constitution to shoot an "unarmed, non-dangerous fleeing suspect," and that an imminent threat of death or serious bodily injury is required before the police can open fire.

Outlaw declined to specify where Siderio's purported gun was located at the time Mendoza fired the final two shots or how close Siderio was to him. Given the unusual decision to terminate a police officer and Outlaw's reference to the violation of the use-of-force policy, it is clear Siderio posed absolutely no threat when Mendoza shot him in the back.

Outlaw, however, did continue to claim that Siderio fired a shot into the unmarked car, which Siderio's family's lawyer, J. Connor Corcoran, disputes. "It's unbelievable that [Outlaw] would refuse to provide factual evidence to the press about the details of the

shooting that she has in her current possession, and then speculate egregiously as to whether or not my client had a gun in his hands, let alone fired one,” he said.

On Tuesday, Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner stated that an investigation of the shooting is ongoing, but he did not indicate whether any criminal charges would be filed against Mendoza or the other three officers. “When it is appropriate for us to do so, we will disclose findings of our currently active investigation and decision on whether or not to pursue any criminal charges,” he said.

Siderio’s death is only one of the latest in a long string of police killings, with over one thousand people losing their lives at the hands of police in the United States on average every year. The middle schooler’s murder is particularly shocking given his youth.

JoAnne Moore, a family friend, started a GoFundMe for Siderio’s funeral expenses last week. “The death of a child is not only devastating but it is a tragedy no matter what the situation,” she wrote. “These grandparents must now say goodbye to their only grandchild, the grandchild they could not save.”

“No matter the circumstances he was just a boy,” wrote a relative in another social media post. “There is a family and community of children mourning and trying to understand the death of another child.”

While the Democratic Party and groups aligned with it, such as Black Lives Matter, treat all police killings as a question of racism against blacks and other minorities, in fact a plurality of those killed each year in the United States are, like Siderio, white. The overwhelming majority of victims of police shootings are from the working class.

There is no way forward against this epidemic of violence against workers through either the Democrats or Republicans, who both continue to increase police budgets year after year, and who agree with President Joe Biden’s recent State of the Union speech in which he proclaimed, “We should all agree the answer is not to defund the police. It’s to fund the police. Fund them. Fund them. Fund them with the resources and training — resources and training they need to protect our communities.”

Police in capitalist class society, far from protecting workers, defend the ruling class against workers. It is only through the unity of the working class, regardless

of race, against the capitalist system, that police violence can be ended.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact