

Pittsburgh officials continue cover-up of police murder of Jim Rogers

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Five Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, police officers have been fired while three others will be reinstated to active duty after an internal investigation into the police murder last year of 54-year-old Jim Rogers. The announcement was made Wednesday by Pittsburgh Mayor Ed Gainey and Public Safety Director Lee Schmidt.

Rogers, a homeless African American man, was brutalized and tased while being arrested on October 13, 2021. He died the following day.

In the five-minute press conference Gainey refused to identify the officers and maintained that evidence obtained by city investigators, including the body cam footage and witness statements, will not be made public or even turned over to the prosecutor's office.

Local media have identified the fired officers as Keith Edmonds, Greg Boss, Pat Desaro, Neyib Velazquez and Sgt. Colby Neidig. The rehired officers, who will undergo retraining, are Sgt. Carol Ehlinger and Officers Jeff Dean and Paul Froehlich.

Gainey and Schmidt also refused to answer questions as to why the other three officers were not fired. An internal investigation, conducted by the City's Office of Municipal Investigation found that all eight should have been dismissed. A ninth officer, a lieutenant and highest ranking officer on duty during the arrest, was allowed to retire and retain his pension.

The police union now has two weeks to file an appeal of the dismissals, something which they have already indicated they would do. The officers' cases would then go to an arbitrator who would determine if they will get their jobs back or not. All eight officers have been receiving full pay for the past five months.

On Wednesday afternoon, Rogers' family said that all the officers should have been fired and criminal charges brought against them.

"The family acknowledges five officers have been fired. But from the beginning, we have been pressing for criminal charges for all of these officers," they said in a statement. "That has always been the demand."

Devon Adwoa, who has served as a spokesperson for the Rogers family, told the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* that the mayor was covering up for the police.

"The process serves the police and not the community," Adwoa said. "It protects the police officers because they refuse to release their names."

In a direct attack on the Gainey administration and his promise for change, Adwoa told the *Tribune*, "What status quo has been challenged if for three months of Gainey's term, he's said nothing?" she asked.

In the press conference the newly elected Gainey delivered the general platitude that "my heart and my prayers go out to the Rogers family" but also stated that he has not been in contact with the family and did not have any plans to talk with them.

Police claim that they were responding to a 911 call about a stolen bike when they encountered Rogers. Recording of that call has yet to be released.

When police arrived, Rogers was sitting on the porch of the house that had the bike in its yard with a "For Sale" sign on it. Rogers explained that he had merely taken the bike on a test ride. When police arrived, the bike was back in the yard with the "For Sale" sign still attached.

Witness accounts and video taken on neighbors' cell phones show Rogers explaining to officers that he did not do anything as the officer yelled louder and louder at him. Witnesses also testified that it was clear that Rogers suffered from mental health issues.

Cell phone video shows Rogers being tased and viciously rolled along the street as he was kicked and tased repeatedly by police. Police can be seen kicking Rogers in his back multiple times as he attempted to stand up, pushing him back down onto the pavement and tasing him again and again.

After his arrest, Rogers was then thrown into the back of a police car. Pittsburgh paramedics arrived on the scene but did not treat or even check on Rogers' condition, instead treating police officers for "blood splatter."

Rogers was not transported to a hospital for more than 30 minutes after his arrest. The police who were transporting

him deliberately avoided West Penn and Shadyside Hospitals, each only a few blocks away, or UPMC Hospital in the nearby Oakland neighborhood and instead took him to a hospital further away in downtown Pittsburgh.

While not released by the city, additional information about Rogers' murder was leaked to the press which indicates the brutality of assault that was made against him at the hands of the police.

During his arrest Rogers was tased at least 11 times, not the three times initially reported.

While handcuffed in the back of the police cruiser for 17 minutes, Rogers repeatedly begged for help. He can be seen seeking medical attention, including telling officers he needed medical attention and that he could not breathe and even going so far as banging his head against the car window.

While being transported, Rogers again told the two police officers in the car with him that he needed medical attention before passing out. The police officers did not check on him or attempt CPR, making the absolutely ridiculous claim that they thought he had "gone to sleep."

Upon arriving at the hospital, the arresting police officer, who was following those transporting Rogers, began performing CPR until medical personnel took over. Why he did that if Rogers was merely asleep, police did not say. Hospital officials also have not said if they revived Rogers during the CPR. His time of death is listed as the next day.

No charges have been filed against any of the nine officers involved in Rogers' death. The district attorney has instead convened a grand jury to hear testimony. Testimony and transcript of grand jury proceedings are being kept secret. What if any charges prosecutors ask for are never revealed and are often a means that prosecutors use for shielding police from charges.

Mayor Gainey has refused to condemn the actions of the police and justified the refusal of the city to release information, including the results of its own investigation and the body and car cam footage of the arrest, claiming that the process had to be followed.

Why, when police commit a crime, evidence must be kept secret, he never explained. Every 5:00 and 6:00 local newscast is filled with convenience store or gas station footage of the latest robbery.

When asked what steps would be taken to prevent this from happening again, Gainey said he stood for more community policing, meaning a greater number of police on the street, especially in low-income working class communities. He touted a stunt held the day before in which he and members of his staff walked through the Homewood neighborhood and held a community meeting afterwards.

Gainey himself won election as Pittsburgh's first African

American mayor in response to the outrage over the May 25, 2020 murder of George Floyd and the brutal crackdown by police on those peacefully protesting that outrage.

The massive protests that erupted in 2020 after Floyd's death were among the largest protests in United States history. They were multiracial and multiethnic demonstrations and expanded throughout the world. They reflected the broad hatred within the population for the treatment meted out to minorities, the working class and the poor by the police.

However, the protests were largely diverted by the Black Lives Matters movement and pseudo-left organizations into identity politics and support for the Democrats in the 2020 elections, including the election of Biden as president. They claimed that police violence could be ended with the election of Democrats, who would in turn carry out reforms of policing and police departments. Instead the Democrats have funneled COVID-19 pandemic relief aid to the police, and President Biden used his State of the Union Address to push for even more funding.

Pittsburgh residents expressed outrage over the lenient treatment of the police.

One resident criticized Gainey, telling the WSWS, "[T]hose police should be in jail. You can watch the video; there is no reason for that man to be kicked and tased while he is on the ground. You have eight or nine police officers all around him. How many people does it take to arrest a homeless man?

"People say that Rogers had mental illness. I cannot speak to that; I did not know him. But it is clear he was not a threat to anyone. He never resisted the police or raised a hand. If you treated a dog that way, you would be in jail. Yet it is okay for the police to treat a homeless person that way.

"Gainey is no different than the other politicians. He works with the police; they are all part of the system."



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