

Grand Rapids law enforcement releases name of officer who murdered Patrick Lyoya

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The police officer who shot Patrick Lyoya in the back of the head following a traffic stop on April 4 was identified as Christopher Schurr at a Grand Rapids Police Department (GRPD) press conference on Monday. Schurr, 31, was sworn in as a member of the Grand Rapids, Michigan police force in 2015.

In identifying Schurr, who is on administrative leave while Lyoya's murder is being investigated by the Michigan State Police (MSP), GRPD Chief Eric Winstrom said he made the information public, "in the interest of transparency, to reduce on-going speculation and to avoid other confusion."

Winstrom added, "Beginning this week, as required by law, the Grand Rapids Police Department will be releasing documents in response to requests made under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) relative to this incident."

Winstrom did not say who made the FOIA request. One reason he backtracked on his previous stance that the identity of the officer would not be released unless charges were brought against him is that his name was already circulating online.

USA Today reported on Monday that Grand Rapids City Manager Mark Washington acknowledged growing demands for the officer's name to be released after the funeral for Patrick Lyoya on Friday. Washington said, "he would discuss the matter with Winstrom and city employment officials," according to the *USA Today* report.

Responding to the release of Schurr's identity, family attorney Ven Johnson said, "An intentional three-week delay in releasing the name of the involved officer, which they clearly knew at the moment of the shooting, is offensive and the exact opposite of being 'transparent.'" Johnson added, "Once again, we see the Grand Rapids Police Department taking care of its

own at the expense of the family's mental health and well-being."

This is the second time that Chief Winstrom has been forced to backtrack on efforts to shield his department and Schurr from demands by Lyoya's family and protesters that the complete truth about what happened on April 4 be revealed publicly.

When the victim's father, Peter Lyoya—who speaks only Swahili and communicates through an interpreter—was told by law enforcement not to talk about what he saw on the video that recorded his son's murder, he refused to do so. This was a critical element in the protest movement that developed in Grand Rapids in the first week after the shooting.

Protests by workers and young people have taken place in Grand Rapids, Lansing and Detroit over the past three weeks demanding justice for Lyoya. A 26-year-old Congolese refugee, Lyoya came to the US at the age of 18, worked at an automotive parts factory in the area and had two small children. He was shot execution-style by Schurr after a traffic stop for a purported license plate violation devolved into a physical altercation in a residential Grand Rapids neighborhood.

Initially, protesters demanded that police release the videos of the brutal shooting, which had been kept from public view by both the GRPD and the Kent County prosecutor's office on the grounds that they would not be released while the MSP investigation was still underway.

However, as protests grew outside police headquarters in downtown Grand Rapids, law enforcement authorities were forced to release all four videos on April 13. The videos that were released had portions of the audio redacted and an important segment of Schurr's bodycam footage is missing

because GRPD says that his camera was turned off.

Nonetheless, the videos show that Lyoya was confused and frightened by the stop, while Schurr was verbally aggressive and quick to put his hands on the young man when he started to walk away from the officer after being asked for his driver's license. Lyoya responded to being grabbed by Schurr by attempting to run away, at which point, the officer gave chase and tackled Lyoya on the front lawn of a residential home.

When Lyoya was able to stand and begin to break free, Schurr attempted to deploy his taser, Lyoya grabbed it and pulled it down and away from the officer. In the struggle, the officer repeatedly demanded, "Let go of the taser" and wrestled the driver to the ground again. Then, with Lyoya's head pressed against the grass, Schurr pulled his handgun, pressed it against his head and pulled the trigger.

Lyoya was unarmed and the videos show that at no point did he verbally threaten or strike Schurr with his hands or anything else. An independent autopsy conducted by noted forensic pathologist Dr. Werner Spitz and released on April 19 confirmed that Lyoya was killed instantly by a "large-caliber bullet" that was fired at the lower left of his head, went up through his skull and lodged in his right temporal bone. The autopsy by Dr. Spitz also showed that Lyoya had no other injuries and is consistent with what is seen on the videos: he was never a threat to Schurr in any way.

When asked about the release of Schurr's identity, MSP spokesperson Lieutenant Michelle Robinson said her department had been notified of GRPD's plans. "The Michigan State Police will continue to ensure that all evidence and facts are accurately collected and documented," Robinson told the *Detroit Free Press*.

Although no date has been given for the completion of the investigation, MSP will forward the results to the office of Kent County Prosecutor Chris Becker once it is complete. Becker was not available for comment on the release of the officer's name.

A right-wing campaign is underway to brand Patrick Lyoya as a criminal and bolster standard law enforcement justifications for the use of lethal force. Among those advocating that Schurr not be fired, charged and prosecuted for murder is Tudor Nixon, candidate for the Republican nomination in the Michigan governor's race. Nixon, who is from Norton

Shores on Lake Michigan in the Grand Rapids area, issued a statement on April 14 that said, "We will not let this officer—or any officer—be sandbagged for reasonably protecting themselves and our communities by weak politicians who are afraid to say and do what is right."

These open supporters of police violence are also being given backing from the *Detroit Free Press* with its coverage of Lyoya's murder. On Sunday, *Free Press* journalists Tresa Baldas and Elisha Anderson wrote a despicable feature that included an account of Lyoya's record with law enforcement and unsubstantiated allegations of domestic abuse.

Meanwhile, on Monday, in its report on the release of Schurr's identity, the *Free Press* gave a glowing profile of the officer, who attended Siena Heights University in Adrian, Michigan. He was "a top athlete," they wrote, who set a conference record in the pole vault and planned to marry his fiancée "in the African nation of Kenya, which is about 400 miles east of Lyoya's homeland of the Democratic Republic of the Congo."

In both cases, the *Free Press's* report on Lyoya's run-ins with the police—a common experience for working class young people of every racial and ethnic background in towns and cities across the US—and the accolades for Schurr, have nothing to do with the shooting that took place on April 4. However, these things are being published to condition the public for the likely announcement by the Kent County prosecutor's office that Schurr will not be charged with a crime on the grounds that he "followed department procedures" and Lyoya ignored his commands, resisted arrest and was a threat to the officer.



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