

Officer sentenced to 2.5 years for civil rights violations in George Floyd murder

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Former St. Paul, Minnesota, police officer Thomas Lane was sentenced this week for his role in the police murder of George Floyd in May 2020. Lane is one of three officers convicted in February of violating Floyd's civil rights by failing to administer medical aid after officer Derek Chauvin knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes.

Judge Paul Magnuson sided with the defense and issued a 2.5 year sentence, arguing that Lane had played a "minimal" role in the incident and citing 145 letters of support for Lane that he had received. "It's not unusual to receive letters," said Magnuson. "But I have never received so many letters."

Federal prosecutors and Floyd's family had pushed for the maximum sentence of 5.5 to 6.5 years in prison while the defense called for a sentence of 2.25 years.

Lane will also have to pay an undetermined amount in restitution to Floyd's family and will be placed on supervised release for two years after his sentence is served. The judge further recommended that Lane be held in the federal prison in Duluth, Minnesota, so that he may be closer to his family.

In addition to this week's sentencing, Lane pleaded guilty to state charges of aiding and abetting second degree manslaughter in May. Both rulings follow the sentencing of Derek Chauvin to 22 years in federal prison on charges of both manslaughter and second degree murder.

Lane had pleaded guilty to those charges as part of plea deal with the office of Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison. The deal resulted in a recommendation that the court sentence Lane to three years in prison on state charges to be served concurrently with his federal sentence. He is expected to be sentenced on these charges in September.

While both the prosecution and the defense have

agreed to recommend the three year sentence, it will be up to the court to decide how long he will actually serve. Given the shorter sentence issued this week and standard rules for probation it is possible that Lane may be released after just two years on good behavior.

The lenient sentence for Lane sparked outrage from Floyd's family. Floyd's nephew, Brandon Williams, called the sentencing a "slap in the face" and said that Lane "also made the decision to kill my uncle. He knew exactly what he was supposed to do and he chose not to do it. That's not an accident. That is a choice."

Philonise Floyd, George Floyd's brother, said that "The fact that this judge had a chance to deliver a maximum amount of time and he chose not to—what did that tell other people around the world? What does that tell people of color? The fact that they went below the [recommended] sentence, that's terrible, because you give other people, for other crimes, way more time than that."

Floyd's comments reflect a bitter reality for working class people. A federal mandatory minimum sentence for selling marijuana is five years, twice the amount of time that Lane will serve for a civil rights violation that led to a Floyd's death, as well as an admission to manslaughter. Hundreds of thousands of people have been incarcerated for relatively minor, nonviolent drug-related offenses who have seen far longer time behind bars than Lane will.

It is a stark demonstration of the role of the police and the courts in capitalist society. Both fundamentally exist to uphold the law of capitalist property relations and enforce the will of the ruling class. As long as the capitalist system remains, the police will continue to have the near complete impunity to harass, injure and kill workers. The only reason that Chauvin and his accomplices have faced any consequences for their

actions is due to the mass outrage that Floyd's murder caused and the ruling classes' sensitivity to controlling such protests.

Like the Democrats at the January 6 hearings, Judge Magnuson aims to reduce the murder of Floyd to the actions of a single person, placing all blame on Chauvin and exonerating Lane and his fellow officers, Tou Thao and J. Alexander Kueng, of their collective responsibility for Floyd's death.

The judge's sympathy for the three other police officers involved was shown by his comment that Chauvin had not only killed Floyd but "absolutely destroyed the lives of three other young officers by taking charge at this scene."

The officers had made similar arguments during their defense. Lane argued that Chauvin had dismissed his suggestions that they roll Floyd onto his side, and both Thao and Kueng claimed that they trusted Chauvin as their senior officer.

Thao and Kueng have also been convicted of civil rights abuses, but have refused plea deals offered by prosecutors on charges of aiding and abetting second degree murder and manslaughter. They will face trial on these charges in state court on October 24.



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