

# Alleging financial crimes, Georgia police arrest 3 organizers of Atlanta Solidarity Fund in militarized SWAT raid

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On the morning of Wednesday, May 31, heavily armed Atlanta SWAT police, backed by a helicopter conducting overwatch, launched a militarized raid on the offices of the Atlanta Solidarity Fund. Video of the raid shows an armored police truck and at least 10 cops wearing body armor, carrying ballistic shields and wielding semi-automatic rifles as they approach the house, which is located in a residential neighborhood of Atlanta, Georgia.

Three board members of the organization, Marlon Scott Kautz, 39, Adele MacLean, 42, and Savannah Patterson, 30, were arrested for alleged “money laundering and charity fraud,” that is, nonviolent crimes, per the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI), which led the raid in conjunction with the Atlanta Police. While the crimes Kautz, MacLean and Patterson are accused of are nonviolent, money laundering is a serious charge that carries with it a possible 20-year prison sentence, while charity fraud has a possible one- to five-year sentence.

After arresting the three, police were observed taking out boxes with material from the residence.

The Atlanta Solidarity Fund was founded in 2016 and is one of dozens of bail fund organizations in the United States that emerged in the wake of the protests following the 2014 police murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. The group provides bail money to arrestees, helps them navigate the arcane US justice system, including finding lawyers, and also provides grants to activist groups.

For more than two years, the Atlanta Solidarity Fund has been heavily involved in raising funds in support of those arrested while protesting “Cop City,” a proposed military-style police training facility on the city’s outskirts, including for the 42 people who have been charged in the last year under state domestic terrorism laws. Exposing the trumped-up character of the terrorism charges, some of the protesters’ alleged “terrorist” activity included having muddy shoes or the phone number to the Atlanta Solidarity Fund written on their arm at

the time of their arrest.

In addition to the 42 protesters facing domestic terrorism charges, three other protesters are facing felony intimidation charges for distributing flyers that named the police officers involved in the murder of environmental activist and Venezuelan immigrant, 26-year-old Manuel “Tortuguita” Terán. The GBI is currently overseeing a cover-up investigation into Tortuguita’s firing squad execution by police.

The heavy-handed arrest of the bail fund organizers is a blatant attack on the democratic and constitutional rights of the entire working class. The arrests are aimed at intimidating and criminalizing any opposition, including the raising of legal funds for those protesting the construction of “Cop City” in Atlanta and the unending reign of police terror across the country.

Refuting claims from capitalist politicians that opposition to the building of the multimillion-dollar Atlanta Public Safety Training Center originates from “outside agitators,” Kautz and MacLean are residents of Atlanta and own the house where the raid was conducted, while Patterson is from Savannah, Georgia.

Following the raid, several civil rights organizations released statements denouncing the arrests. Lauren Regan, executive director of the Civil Liberties Defense Center, wrote: “This is an extreme provocation by Atlanta Police Department and the State of Georgia. ... Bailing out protesters who exercise their constitutionally protected rights is simply not a crime.”

The Bail Project, another nonprofit founded in 2017 to provide bail for people who cannot afford it, released a statement that read in part, “this excessive display of force was used both to retaliate against those who have been engaged in acts of civil disobedience to protest the building of the facility and to intimidate those who support nonviolent actions like operating a community bail fund.”

As of this writing, all three members of the Atlanta Solidarity Fund are currently locked up in the DeKalb County Jail awaiting their bond hearing. Records released by the DeKalb County Sheriff's Office earlier this year showed that nine inmates died within the confines of the jail last year, the deadliest since 2012. A day before the raid on the offices of the Atlanta Solidarity Fund, the DeKalb County Sheriff's Office robotically announced its first "official" death inside DeKalb County jail this year: "Doraville, Georgia resident Enil Guillen, 20, was found hanging in his jail cell and unresponsive on Monday, May 29, 2023."

According to NPR (National Public Radio), MacLean, Kautz and Patterson are "respectively the CEO, chief financial officer and secretary of the Network for Strong Communities, which was incorporated in 2020 and runs the Atlanta Solidarity Fund."

As of this writing, the arrest warrants for the accused have not been made public. However, some major media organizations have been given access to them. According to the *USA Today*, which received copies of the warrants from the GBI, the agency is accusing Kautz, MacLean and Patterson of "misleading contributors" by using the monies they raised for purchasing "gasoline, COVID-19 rapid tests, and yard signs, as well as reimbursements for moving a jail support hotline to a new plan and purchasing a safe from Amazon."

Speaking to the *USA Today*, attorney Don Samuel, who is representing the three organizers, said that while the prosecutor is claiming that donors were misled because not every single dollar donated went directly to bail relief, "needless to say, all charities are allowed to have administrative expenses."

There is widespread opposition to the building of "Cop City," a \$90 million military-style police training complex, which has the backing of the entire political establishment, from Republican Georgia Governor Brian Kemp to Democratic Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens.

There is no question that the arrests were approved at the highest levels of the Georgia state government. Immediately following the raid, Governor Kemp released a thuggish and lying statement claiming: "These criminals facilitated and encouraged domestic terrorism with no regard for others, watching as communities faced the destructive consequences of their actions." Kemp threatened to "track down every member of a criminal organization, from violent foot soldiers to their uncaring leaders."

Republican Attorney General Chris Carr also released a statement on Twitter vowing not to rest "until we have held accountable every person who has funded, organized, or

participated in this violence and intimidation."

Unsurprisingly, Carr has not shown a similar zeal for prosecuting supporters of Trump's failed violent coup, no doubt because he was intimately involved in it. Carr was the former head of the powerful Republican Attorney Generals' Association (RAGA), including on January 6, 2021. Just prior to the attack on Congress, the Rule of Law Defense Fund, which works in tandem with RAGA, sent out an automated robocall to Trump supporters urging them to go "march to the Capitol building" and "stop the steal." Carr later claimed that the robocall was authorized without his approval; three months after the failed coup, he stepped down as head of RAGA.

Opposition to the creation of "Cop City" continues to grow, especially in the wake of the raid, and new estimates revealed by the Atlanta City Council show that taxpayers will be forced to foot over two-thirds of the cost of the sprawling multibuilding compound. In the last week the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported that public funding for the construction of the facility will be \$67 million, double the \$33.5 million public contribution the council had been quoting for years. The additional cost stems from a "lease back" provision, which requires the city to pay \$1.2 million a year, for 30 years, to the Atlanta Police Foundation for use of the facilities.

The remaining funding for the 85-acre police training complex, which will require the demolition of acres of Atlanta-area forest, are to come from the Atlanta Police Foundation and the major corporations behind it, such as Delta Airlines, Home Depot, Wells Fargo, Coca-Cola, Bank of America and Norfolk Southern.

Paul Brown, the CEO of Inspire Brands, which includes fast-food franchises Dunkin' Donuts, Baskin Robbins and Arby's, and Norm Brothers, executive vice president and chief legal and compliance officer at UPS, are just two of the dozens of well-paid corporate executives who sit on the board of trustees of the Atlanta Police Foundation.



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