

Trial of former Grand Rapids, Michigan cop who killed Patrick Lyoya ends in hung jury

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On Thursday, Judge Christina Mims declared a mistrial in the second-degree murder trial of Christopher Schurr, a former Grand Rapids police officer, after three days of deliberations failed to yield a unanimous verdict in the death of Patrick Lyoya.

The trial resulted in a hung jury after 12 jurors failed to come to a unanimous verdict that Schurr was either guilty or not guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in the murder of Lyoya. After informing Judge Mims of a deadlock on Tuesday, jurors were instructed to continue deliberating and, after more than 24 hours, were unable to reach a unanimous decision as required by Michigan law.

When it became apparent that the jury was likely deadlocked, Kent County Prosecutor Chris Becker moved to have a lesser charge considered, but this failed to resolve the issue. Now Becker must decide whether to retry the case, dismiss the charges or pursue a plea agreement with Schurr.

More than three years have passed since the traffic stop that led to the killing of Lyoya, a 26-year-old immigrant from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), on April 4, 2022.

Dash camera, body camera and cell phone footage shown in court showed Lyoya's last moments of life in graphic detail. A scuffle broke out after Lyoya attempted to flee, and Schurr chased him down. Lyoya was able to wrestle Schurr's Taser away from him.

In the struggle, Schurr ultimately gained control and positioned himself over Lyoya. He removed his handgun from its holster, placed it against the back of Lyoya's head and pulled the trigger. The use of a deadly force was made without issuing any verbal warning.

The defense claimed that Schurr feared for his life and acted in self-defense, while the prosecution argued that Lyoya posed no threat to Schurr. The mistrial comes only one day after three former Memphis officers were acquitted of all charges in the fatal beating of Tyre Nichols after a traffic stop, in another miscarriage of justice.

Both cases are part of a broader pattern of police violence directed overwhelmingly against the most impoverished and

marginalized sections of the working class, including immigrants and unarmed black individuals. While it is a fact that a plurality of those killed by police in the US are white men, it is also true that blacks and Hispanics are arrested, searched and subjected to the use of force rates which are disproportionate to their percentage of the total population.

While minorities are significantly more likely than white Americans to be victimized by police violence and brutality, in some areas of the country, such as the rural South, white and black men are killed by police at nearly identical rates. This points directly to the class nature of police violence and its relationship to the repressive purpose of the entire law enforcement apparatus as an instrument of capitalist rule.

Since the 2020 police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, there has been a heightened awareness of police violence and murder and widespread public demands for an end to it. With the expanded use of smartphone and bodycam video, there has been an increase in protests and lawsuits across the country that have exposed the nature of unjust police interactions and the attempt by law enforcement agencies to cover up these crimes.

Now, murderous officers have found a friend in President Trump, who has been outspoken in his support for blanket immunity from prosecution for law enforcement officers. Trump has stated he wants federal guarantees that police officers will not be charged with crimes so they can "do their job" and often describes unreasonable force cases against officers as "frivolous lawsuits."

It is within this context that the trial of Schurr for the brutal murder of Lyoya in Grand Rapids ended in a hung jury and the three officers in Memphis were acquitted of all charges in the savage beating death of Tyre Nichols.

Tensions surrounding Schurr's trial have been high, with protesters gathering outside the courthouse throughout the week. Lyoya's supporters held Black Lives Matter signs and chanted for justice for Patrick Lyoya. Schurr's supporters have been accused of cheering him on as though he were a hero and not someone on trial for murder. Police supporters waved thin blue line flags outside the courthouse to show

their support for former Officer Schurr.

On Tuesday, police resorted to using a powder spray on protesters supporting justice for Lyoya to subdue a confrontation while they were detaining a woman outside the courthouse for alleged fighting.

The declared mistrial has left unanswered question regarding the jury's composition and potential causes for the hung jury. The demographics of the jury were unbalanced with only one black juror, 10 white jurors and three Latino jurors.

Additionally, three of the jurors disclosed ties to law enforcement. Specifically, one juror is involved in a romantic relationship with an officer, another is considering a career in law enforcement, and a third has a familial connection to an officer who was injured in the line of duty. These elements raise legitimate concerns about the jury's ability to remain impartial and render a fair and just verdict.

Judge Mims' mistrial announcement on Thursday was painful for Lyoya's family, who have waited three years for justice for Patrick. Lyoya's father said:

It hurts my family and my wife. We are bleeding, we are in pain. We will continue to fight until we get the true justice for Patrick.

Dorcas, Lyoya's mother, stated, "I am not tired, we did not give up on our son." Addressing the community of supporters, she expressed her gratitude, saying:

We will keep fighting until we get justice for Patrick. ... I want to say just thank you. Thank you so much for standing up with us for all these three years. Thank you.

Lyoya's father added:

Don't give up, don't get tired. We will keep fighting until we get justice. Thank you, thank you so much for standing up with us for all of these three years.

When asked how she felt when Schurr took the stand, Dorcas said that she was surprised the officer did not apologize to the family. Dorcas said:

During his testimony he seemed like he had no remorse or guilt and he didn't care that he took the life of a human being. It seemed like he had only killed an animal and he did not show any emotion or that he was wrong for what he did.

Lyoya's father said:

He displayed like he was joyful and happy for what he did. That was really painful for me and for my entire family. I want him to know he's still carrying the blood of Patrick on him and he's responsible for the blood of Patrick.

Ven Johnson, a civil rights attorney representing the Lyoya family in a civil wrongful death suit against Schurr, expressed that there is a systemic issue with law enforcement in West Michigan. There have been issues with three separate police forces in the area using clear excessive deadly force that was not necessary under the circumstances. In 2022 the Fraternal Order of Police spoke out against the prosecution of Schurr, claiming that it was a "miscarriage of justice." They set up a donation savings account at Lake Michigan Credit Union for contributions by Schurr's supporters.

Johnson commended Kent County Prosecutor Christopher Becker for having the guts to not only criminally charge Schurr with second-degree murder but to have tried the case himself. It is hard to get convictions against police officers in the US, and especially in West Michigan, a conservative area.

And it is very common in the US for officers charged with murder to receive not-guilty verdicts. Johnson stated that they have a very strong civil case against Schurr, and with a lower burden of proof necessary, the attorney expects to win the lawsuit.



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