

Kin of man killed by cops talk with top cop

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FULL TEXT

RELATIVES of a man shot and killed by undercover police in Tacony this week met with Police Commissioner Richard Ross on Thursday to express their concerns about the incident, according to a lawyer for the family. The head of the police union, meanwhile, issued a letter asking for people "to hold judgment until all facts are known," adding: "It's unfortunate that city leaders and others are prematurely second-guessing the tactics of police officers during a volatile and chaotic situation that [led] to the death of an alleged drug suspect."

The developments marked the latest fallout from Monday's shooting, in which a plainclothes officer - identified by the Police Department late Thursday as Richard Nicoletti, a 29-year veteran assigned to the Narcotics Field Unit - fatally shot 36-year-old Jeffrey Dennis.

Police have said Dennis drove his Toyota Camry into another officer as police confronted him while preparing to execute a search warrant for narcotics at his house, on the 7100 block of Cottage Street.

Three officers were injured during the incident, according to police. Dennis was shot in the head and left arm and declared dead at the scene at 4:18 p.m.

Wednesday night, hundreds of people gathered at the site of the shooting, on the 7100 block of Hegerman Street, to mourn Dennis' death.

Lee Merritt, a lawyer for Dennis' relatives, said Thursday that family members met with Ross to ask for a transparent investigation and to detail their concerns. Merritt said that family members hope to be allowed to review surveillance video of the shooting and that they want the officers involved to be fired and criminally charged.

The Police Department's officer-involved-shooting unit is investigating and the state Attorney General's Office will determine whether criminal charges are warranted.

The Philadelphia District Attorney's Office referred the case to the attorney general because top prosecutor Larry Krasner, formerly a defense attorney, had previously represented Dennis, according to spokesperson Ben Waxman. Ross told a reporter for NBC10 this week that "quite candidly we have some concerns about the shooting too, some of the tactics that were used." Mayor Kenney also issued a statement saying in part: "My prayers are with the family and friends of Jeffrey Dennis. It is always tragic to lose someone you love. I am relieved there were no life threatening injuries to the police officers."

The letter from the head of the police union, John McNesby, which was released Thursday, said: "Officers are entitled to due process of law like every other citizen. And our officers are also presumed innocent until proven guilty."

Merritt said that Dennis had three children, ages 6, 11, and 17, and that he had recently gotten engaged.

According to police, undercover officers with the Narcotics Field Unit were conducting surveillance on Dennis' house and were preparing to execute a search warrant there when they saw him driving the Camry.

Six officers in three unmarked police vehicles followed him and then tried to block him with their cars on Hegerman. Dennis attempted to flee from the makeshift barricade, police said, but his car struck several vehicles, and after an officer shattered the driver's door window, he drove into an officer.

At that point, police said, Nicoletti fired three shots at Dennis. He has been put on desk duty pending the investigation into the shooting.

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Credit: By Chris Palmer STAFF WRITER

Illustration

Jeffrey Dennis, who was fatally shot by an undercover cop in Tacony on Monday. COURTESY LEE MERRITT / DENNIS FAMILY ATTORNEY

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