

## Official: Accuracy, timing causes delay in - Danville Register & Bee (VA) - April 9, 2018

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Danville police say concerns about accuracy and timing caused the department to hold off on confirming an officer-involved shooting for 13 hours Sunday.

Virginia State Police, now tasked with investigating the shooting, announced on Monday that **Juan Markee Jones**, 25, of Danville, is the man killed early Sunday morning after city police followed up on a complaint of a domestic assault.

But multiple requests by the Register & Bee on Sunday for confirmation of a shooting were met by statements from the local department that a release would be made about an "incident" under investigation.

That news release came shortly after 2 p.m. Sunday afternoon, noting that Danville officers fatally shot a suspect in a wooded area off of Sunset Drive shortly after a call for help that came in at about 1 a.m. that morning.

A request for comment left at the office of Danville Police Department Chief Scott Booth was not returned Monday, though he did put out a public statement.

"No Police officer wants to use deadly force nor do they want to use any form of force that could result in serious injury," Booth said in a news release. "When death or serious injury happens, we deeply regret the loss of life or injury and we feel compassion for them, their family and their friends."

At Jones' home in North Danville on Monday afternoon, friends and family members gathered outside. A friend of the family who asked not to be named expressed her doubts about the events leading to Jones' death.

"The police just didn't have to shoot him the way they did," she said.

Danville Police Department Lt. Michael Wallace said several factors played into why it took nearly half a day to confirm the shooting, including the event happening in the early morning and on a weekend, as well as efforts to make sure the information about the event was accurate.

Additionally, he said the department worked with state police on the information.

"The state police are the lead agency in this investigation," Wallace said in an email. "The release was put out in cooperation with the State Police and with their input."

The incident leading to Jones' shooting began when a 22-year-old woman complained to

emergency dispatchers that she had been assaulted in a parking lot in the 2300 block of North Main Street, police report. It was while officers were en route there that she told dispatchers she had been followed to her home in the 200 block of Sunset Drive "in an attempt to escape her attacker," police report.

An adult male forced his way into her home, police said. When officers arrived, he walked away, got in a vehicle and drove to a nearby wooded area.

Once there, police tried to use a Taser to stun him, but did that it not "make effective contact." The suspect then "suddenly turned on the officers in a threatening manner" and was shot.

In the Monday news release, Booth said the public shouldn't rush to judgment in regards to rumors about the shooting. But he did not say what the rumors were.

"I ask citizens to reserve judgment and to wait for the State Police investigation to conclude so that factual and accurate information can be communicated to the public," he said in the statement.

The police chief, who was sworn in earlier this year, said the officers involved would relive the shooting for the rest of their lives. He also expressed confidence in the Virginia State Police investigation of the shooting.

Booth said he also met with family members, city government and community members about the shooting.

City Manager Ken Larking said there was misinformation floating around on social media about the circumstances surrounding the incident.

"We would urge people to be skeptical and let the facts come out and be patient as we go through this process," he said. "What we don't want is for people to take this misinformation and react in an inappropriate way that could endanger themselves or others."

The investigation is being conducted by the state police's Bureau of Criminal Investigation's Salem Field Office at the request of Booth. Once the investigation is complete, it will be turned over to Danville Commonwealth's Attorney Michael Newman for review.

Jones had an assault case pending in Danville General District Court when he was killed, court records show. He was arrested on Jan. 29 and charged with misdemeanor assault, as well as two counts of threats over a telephone. He threatened a woman who lived on Sunset Drive with a gun, court records show, and had a hearing set for Tuesday. It could not be determined if the woman who called police on Sunday is the same woman who complained to police of telephoned threats in January.

Jones also had another misdemeanor assault case from Sept. 8, which was dropped by prosecutors in January.

This marks the second officer-involved fatal shooting in Danville this year. On Friday, city Newman

announced his ruling that a Jan. 7 shooting of Richard Towler, 54, was justified.

Danville Officer Justin P. Nelson shot Towler following a 45-minute standoff that began after a woman called 911 claiming that someone was shooting at her at 1069 Halifax Road. When officers arrived at his doorstep, Towler shot at them through his front door, according to body-cam video that Newman showed to the Register & Bee. Nearly an hour later, Towler stepped onto his porch and once more fired at police, video showed. That's when Nelson fired back, fatally striking Towler in the neck, an autopsy report shows. Inside the house, police discovered a deceased Crystal Averett, 38, and a dead dog, both of them shot to death.

"As an organization, we intend to be as transparent about this as possible so that the people of Danville will be confident that the appropriate justice is served," Larking said. "We have a professional and well-trained police department and police officers on our staff. They're going to do the best they can to keep the peace in Danville."

Staff writer John Crane contributed to this report.

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