

Rev. Pfleger, pastors call for independent investigation into cop's fatal shooting of security guard Jemel Roberson

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FULL TEXT

A group of about 50 pastors, activists, church musicians and security guards from across the Chicago area gathered outside the Midlothian Police Department Friday morning to demand justice for a security guard killed by police while attempting to subdue a shooting suspect.

"The whole world is watching," said the Rev. Marshall Hatch, of the Leaders Network. "This will not be something that will be swept under the rug."

The speakers called for an independent investigation into the officer-involved shooting of Jemel Roberson, 26, of Chicago, and demanded that the unnamed white Midlothian officer who shot him be fired and charged criminally. State Sen. Emil Jones III did not attend the news conference, but also released a statement Friday calling for the immediate dismissal of the officer.

Meanwhile, entertainment website TMZ reported that Chicago entertainer Kanye West donated \$150,000 to an online fundraiser to support Roberson's family.

Roberson had been working security inside Manny's Blue Room in Robbins Saturday night and into Sunday morning when a fight broke out between two groups of men and shots were fired.

Amid the chaotic scene, he managed to apprehend one of the bar shooting suspects, and was holding the man at gunpoint on the ground in Manny's parking lot when a Midlothian police officer shot him dead, witnesses said. According to a preliminary Illinois State Police investigation into the shooting that cited "witness statements," the officer gave "multiple verbal commands" to Roberson to drop his gun and get on the ground before shooting him. The preliminary report also said Roberson was wearing "plain black clothing with no markings readily identifying him as a Security Guard."

Witnesses, however, have contradicted that account, saying that the officer opened fire on Roberson before giving him an adequate opportunity to respond to his verbal commands. They also reported that Roberson was wearing garb clearly marked with the word "Security."

The Rev. Michael Pfleger, pastor of St. Sabina Catholic Church, said Friday that the officer who shot Roberson should be fired and charged with murder.

"That's what it was," he said. "It was not blue on blue crime. It was blue on black crime. It was not an accidental shooting."

Pfleger said that if Roberson had been white, he does not believe he would have been shot.

"He would have been questioned, he would have been asked, he would have told Jemel to raise his hands," Pfleger said. "Jemel Roberson is dead for no other reason than doing his job, protecting people. Let's not ignore the elephant in the room. The problem with Jemel is, he was black."

The Rev. Walter Turner, of New Spiritual Light Missionary Baptist Church, said it appeared the Illinois State Police was "trying to muddy up" Roberson's character and that it was necessary for another government body to conduct the investigation into his shooting. He mentioned the attorney general's office and the state's attorney's office as preferable options to the state police.

Turner also called for the immediate release of Roberson's autopsy report.

"The autopsy report will show us just what he was wearing. The report will show us how many times was he shot. The report will show us where he was shot," he said. "We're also calling for the state's attorney Madam Kim Foxx to make sure that we get the proper just due for this man's life and for his family so that they can grieve properly and can bring unfortunate closure to a life that has been taken away."

Jones, the Democratic state senator from Chicago, released the following on his call for the officer's immediate firing:

"Police are shooting people of color far too often. It's time to be more aggressive in our response to these incidents. ...Regardless of the findings of the investigation, this officer has already shown he lacks the basic professional judgment to wear the badge and serve our communities in a law enforcement capacity.

"As we learn more about the case, I will continue to do all I can to ensure that justice prevails."

The Midlothian officer who shot Roberson was placed on paid administrative leave pending the outcome of the ISP investigation into the incident. Police Chief Daniel Delaney said the officer, a member of the patrol division, had been with the department for nearly four years and was a team leader on the regional SWAT team.

"The Midlothian Police Department is completely saddened by this tragic incident and we give our heartfelt condolences to Jemel, his mother, his entire family and his friends," the chief said in a statement released earlier this week. "There are no words that can be expressed as to the sorrow his family is dealing with. We view this as the equivalent of a "blue on blue," friendly fire incident."

Lee Merritt, an attorney retained by the mother of Roberson's infant son, said he saw many parallels between this case and another high-profile police shooting of a black man he's working on in Texas.

"When I started working the Botham case, I said, all right, this is rock bottom for policing. Someone is sitting at home in their apartment, minding their own business. It can't get worse than that," he said, referring to a September incident in which 26-year-old Botham Jean was shot and killed in his own apartment by an off-duty Dallas police officer who said she'd mistaken Jean's apartment for her own and thought he was an intruder. "It just did (get worse)," Merritt said of the Roberson shooting. "They killed a hero, a national hero who's actually out there saving lives, and it has blown me away, honestly. I didn't think it was possible to get worse than Botham Jean and this case just did."

Merritt said he's conducting his own investigation of Roberson's shooting in parallel with the state police's investigation and plans to eventually turn over the evidence he collects to the state's attorney.

Credit: Zak Koeske

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