

Midlothian police officer who fatally shot security guard Jemel Roberson placed on administrative leave, officials say

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FULL TEXT

The Midlothian police officer who fatally shot security guard Jemel Roberson on Sunday at a bar in Robbins has been placed on administrative leave, officials told the Daily Southtown on Tuesday.

The officer, who has not been identified, has worked for the department for seven years and is a member of the South Suburban Emergency Response Team, officials said.

He also is white, Midlothian police Chief Dan Delaney said in an email Tuesday, according to The Associated Press. Roberson was black.

On Monday, a lawsuit was filed against the Midlothian police officer, alleging he used excessive force when he shot the armed on-duty security guard after responding to a shooting incident at the bar. The village of Midlothian was also named in the suit.

The federal lawsuit claims the unnamed officer shot Roberson while he was outside Manny's Blue Room, 2911 S. Claire Blvd., after Roberson had apprehended one of the perpetrators police were seeking.

The shooting was "unprovoked," "unjustified" and "unreasonable," the lawsuit alleges.

Roberson, 26, was pronounced dead at a hospital, a Cook County sheriff's office spokeswoman said. The Cook County medical examiner's office ruled his death a homicide from multiple gunshot wounds.

Delaney issued a statement Tuesday explaining why his initial statement about the shooting Sunday did not specify that Roberson was a security guard and not a suspect, attributing it to what he said were "conflicting reports" at the time.

He said he'd since learned that, "Jemel Roberson was a brave man who was doing his best to end an active shooter situation at Manny's Blue Room.

"The Midlothian Police Department is completely saddened by this tragic incident and we give our heartfelt condolences to Jemel, his family and his friends. There are no words that can be expressed as to the sorrow his family is dealing with," Delaney's statement concludes.

The chief said he could not comment further on the incident, which is under investigation by the Illinois State Police's Public Integrity Task Force, but that he intended to release an additional statement in the coming days after the agency concluded its inquiry and "all of the facts" are known.

Officials said Roberson had been working security at Manny's early Sunday when a verbal altercation involving several men happened. The incident escalated when one of the men opened fire inside the bar around 4 a.m., police said.

Several police agencies responded to the scene including Robbins, Midlothian and the Cook County sheriff's office. One of the responding Midlothian officers "encountered a subject with a gun and was involved in an Officer involved shooting," according to a statement released Sunday by Delaney.

The man shot by police, sheriff's office spokeswoman Sophia Ansari said, "turned out to be a guy working security for the bar."

She said Roberson was armed, but that it was unclear why an officer had shot him. Ansari said he had a valid

firearm owner's identification card and was licensed by the state to work armed security.

Four other people were shot in addition to Roberson, but he was the only one shot by police, Ansari said. The other shooting victims, including the man believed to have initially opened fire inside the bar, are all expected to survive, she said.

The man suspected of firing the gun is still in the hospital and has not yet been charged, Ansari said.

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Gregory Kulis, an attorney for Roberson's family, said Roberson —dressed in all black and wearing a "security hat"—had apprehended one of the men responsible for the bar shooting and was holding him down when the officer opened fire on him.

Kulis said he did not want to speculate about why the officer may have shot Roberson. The suit alleges the officer's actions were "intentional, willful and wanton," and it demands \$1 million in damages.

The attorney said Roberson was a "churchgoing guy" who lived alone on the West Side of Chicago and served as a church organist, in addition to working security at Manny's. A GoFundMe page created in Roberson's honor for the purpose of paying burial expenses has already raised more than \$20,000.

It describes Roberson as "a young man who was greatly loved by all who knew him," and says he was a gifted basketball player and musician. "His love for God and his family were at the forefront of his life," the page said.

On Monday, a Lane Tech College Prep Twitter account tweeted a remembrance of Roberson, identifying him as a 2010 graduate of the Roscoe Village high school and member of its basketball team.

"Jemel had a big smile and a bigger heart," the post reads. "You will be missed."

Friends and family held a vigil outside Manny's late Monday afternoon to honor Roberson, speak about his character and express their dismay over the incident, which many said they connected to his race.

"This was not reckless policing, this was homicidal policing," one man said. "They saw a black man with a gun. If he did not have a gun, his black skin made him a weapon."

"As a community, we demand respectful engagement. We want the police to treat our people with just a certain amount of dignity and respect. They patrol the black community like some ... Gestapo being judge, jury and executioner."

Harvey Ald. Keith Price, who attended the vigil because he said he believed it was important for elected officials to speak out in such situations, called on State's Attorney Kim Foxx to open an investigation into the shooting.

"This could have been my son. This could have been any one of our sons," he said of Roberson. "So Kim Foxx, do the right thing, open up a full out investigation. That's what you got elected for."

The state's attorney's office did immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Illinois State Police, which is already investigating the Midlothian officer's actions, declined to comment on its investigation.

The Robbins Department of Inspectional Services and Mayor Tyrone Ward have ordered Manny's to temporarily close pending the outcome of "a full examination of the facility."

"The village of Robbins sends its deepest condolences to the family of Jemel Roberson for this unfortunate tragedy," Ward said. "We ask that the Robbins community continue to keep the Roberson family lifted in prayer during this trying time."

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