

'This isn't over,' says the family of the man shot and killed by South Whitehall Township police

Laurie Mason Schroeder; Thompson, Carol . The Morning Call (Online) , Allentown: Tribune Interactive, LLC. Aug 8, 2018.

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FULL TEXT

After learning that the South Whitehall Township police officer who fatally shot Joseph Santos was charged criminally, Santos' family vowed Tuesday to make sure the officer is convicted and stripped of his badge. Calling officer Jonathan Roselle "trigger happy," Arlene Figueroa, the mother of one of Santos' children, said she could not understand why Roselle, a rookie, wasn't working with a partner, since he appeared to be too inexperienced to handle stressful situations.

Lehigh County District Attorney Jim Martin said Roselle graduated from the Allentown Police Academy in 2017 and had only been on patrol alone for five months.

"I don't wish him harm," Figueroa said of Roselle, as she clutched a sign that displayed pictures of Santos' and their 8-year-old daughter. "I pray that he's able to close his eyes and not picture what I see at night."

The family spoke moments after Martin announced his decision to charge Roselle with voluntary manslaughter, a felony. They gathered on the sidewalk outside the courthouse in Allentown with their attorney, Robert Eyre, and others.

Eyre said they are considering a wrongful death lawsuit. He said the district attorney's decision in finding the killing unjustified was a "step in the right direction" that will help the family find closure.

"This was an important event that a lot of people did not expect, so we need to think carefully about what that means for a civil remedy," Eyre said. "There's a tendency in these things, and it often doesn't go this way. There's anger but there's gratefulness for this much."

Martin's decision did little to appease community activists who stood with the Santos family as they addressed the media.

Adanjesus Marin, director of Make the Road Pennsylvania, which advocates for Latino communities, said Santos' death was not isolated but part of a systemic problem in which people of color are too often targets of police violence.

At his news conference, Martin acknowledged the "overarching problem of police who resort to deadly force as a first option." He added, "Together with the community, we will present demands of changes [we want made at] police departments throughout the valley and state to ensure this never happens again."

Ashleigh Strange, Make the Road's spokeswoman, said the organization will support the Santos family through the court process and keep pressure on Lehigh Valley police.

"You can see from the makeup of the police officers in this area that it's skewed. And we want to make sure from now on that it's skewed toward justice. That's what we've been fighting for for years."

Strange and the NAACP said they want Roselle off the force. Police Chief Glen Dorney said he is on paid leave.

"If they convict this officer, and we hope that they will, he won't be able to serve from behind bars," Strange said.

Figueroa said Santos' funeral arrangements have not yet been finalized but that the family was told they must have a closed casket because his face was disfigured by a bullet.

She said the family will be keeping a close eye on the case to make sure Santos gets the justice he deserves.

"We have to keep fighting," she said. "This is just a hurdle right now. We got over this hurdle by the grace of God, And we're going to keep getting over because we will have justice for Joey. As long as we have air in our lungs, we will fight for Joey. He didn't deserve this."

Credit: Laurie Mason Schroeder, Carol Thompson

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