

SLED investigating fatal deputy-involved shooting

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FULL TEXT

"It's a sad day when the person that calls law enforcement for help is actually shot and killed by law enforcement."

Jermaine Massey's mother

A man is dead, and four Greenville County deputies have been placed on leave after an officer-involved shooting in the Poe Mill community Monday.

Deputies said Jermaine Massey, 35, charged at them with a knife after they responded to Massey's home on 3rd Avenue for a reported disturbance.

Massey was struck at least once and was taken to Greenville Memorial Hospital where he died.

The State Law Enforcement Division was asked to investigate. The four deputies involved have been placed on administrative leave pending the outcome of an internal investigation, per department protocol.

"We're very much still investigating," SLED spokesman Thom Berry said. "We left the scene late last night and are working the case today. We are still in the process of collecting information."

Greenville County Sheriff Will Lewis said a 911 call came in about 5:31 p.m. about a disturbance at 234 3rd Avenue. He said about 10 minutes later, deputies got to the scene and found a man who was "very agitated" and armed with "something similar to a butcher's knife." Officers tried to talk to him to get the knife out of his hand, Lewis said.

There were at least five people in the home, "potential hostage victims," so deputies tried to get them out as quickly as they could, Lewis said.

Deputies called for backup around 5:45 p.m., he said. When the other deputies arrived and negotiations failed, deputies tried "less lethal options." Those options also failed, Lewis said.

A short while later, the man turned to the officers and began to charge at them with a knife, Lewis said.

Berry said a SLED agent was present for Massey's autopsy. He said evidence is being taken to a lab for testing as part of an investigation.

He said only one dashboard camera was recording from a deputy's vehicle.

Only one patrol vehicle had its lights and sirens activated, which automatically prompts the in-car video camera to start recording, Berry said. That vehicle was parked in front of the home and the incident primarily took place behind the home, Berry said. The other vehicles that responded did not have lights and sirens activated so the dashboard cameras were not recording.

Berry said he was unsure if the deputies were wearing body cameras.

Sgt. Ryan Flood, a Sheriff's Office spokesman, declined to release the identities of the deputies involved. A request for the 911 call was also denied. The Greenville News has also requested a copy of the dashboard camera from the scene.

Bruce Wilson, founder of Fighting Injustice Together, said Massey's family has reached out to the nonprofit to seek assistance in getting the Sheriff's Office and SLED to release video footage and 911 communications.

"The biggest focus now is body cam footage being released and the 911 tape," Wilson said. "That's the main thing, to make sure nothing is compromised. If everything happened the way the Sheriff's Office says it happened, then release the tapes."

The neighborhood was quiet Tuesday morning. A strand of yellow caution tape was still tied around a stop sign on 3rd Avenue.

Talasha Shaw said Monday night she learned of the incident because she was coming to see her friend, who was Massey's girlfriend.

When she arrived, deputies were on the scene. Yellow crime scene tape blocked traffic from entering the street lined by mill houses.

Shaw said she called her friend to ask what happened "because usually nothing really happens on this street." "I'm not going to say it was scary," Shaw said. "It was more of a surprise because it's not really stuff you hear of happening to one of your family members or friends."

Shaw said Massey's girlfriend is looking for further explanation of what happened.

"You can't expect her to smile or whatever. She just wants answers and to know what's the next step and what we've got to do to get this resolved," Shaw said. "Keep her and her family and his family in your prayers."

In front of Massey's home Tuesday was a tricycle and small child's bicycle. A woman sobbing on Massey's front porch declined to comment.

Wilson said Massey's family is already mourning the loss of Massey's grandfather, with a funeral taking place Tuesday.

"That's what was going on with him before this happened," Wilson said.

He said once the family has concluded the funeral for Massey's grandfather, they would turn their focus to seeking answers in the officer-involved shooting.

"She's sad, she's upset," Wilson said. "She's lost right now. She doesn't know what's going on."

Wilson released the following statement from Massey's mother: "It's a sad day when the person that calls law enforcement for help is actually shot and killed by law enforcement. As the family, we simply seek truth, inclusion and transparency from all investigating agencies, and as such we would ask that the body-camera footage and 911 tape be released within 48 hours."

The shooting marks South Carolina's 10th officer-involved shooting this year, Berry said.

The most recent fatal shooting involving the Sheriff's Office was Nov. 19, 2017, when four deputies were placed on leave after firing at 27-year-old Jacob McCarty at the end of a vehicle chase. The 13th Circuit Solicitor's Office cleared the deputies of any criminal wrongdoing in that case.

Authorities said deputies used less-than-lethal tactics to subdue McCarty first before McCarty brandished a pistol and the deputies fired shots.

On Oct. 16, 2017, 32-year-old Michael Chappell was killed during what was described by authorities as a hostage situation in Simpsonville. Greenville County deputies fired at Chappell when he came out of a house with a hostage. The hostage was not injured.

In February 2017, deputies shot and killed Jason Mendez, 37, of Fountain Inn, after demanding that he get out of a vehicle. Deputies were cleared in that case months later.

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CAPTION:

Greenville County Sheriff's Department officers investigate the scene of an officer-involved shooting on Monday.

JOSH MORGAN/Staff

DETAILS

Subject:	Cameras; Sheriffs; Criminal investigations; Law enforcement
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