

Midlothian police identify officer who shot Jemel Roberson outside Robbins bar

Koeske, Zak . Chicago Tribune (Online) , Chicago: Tribune Interactive, LLC. Jan 18, 2019.

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FULL TEXT

The Midlothian Police Department on Friday identified Ian Covey as the police officer who fatally shot security guard Jemel Roberson outside a Robbins bar in November.

The department's announcement came shortly after an attorney for Roberson's estate, which is suing Midlothian and the officer, added the officer's name as a defendant in the lawsuit—an action that named the officer publicly for the first time.

The Midlothian Police Department and Illinois State Police, which are investigating the shooting, had thus far refused to name the officer, citing the possible threat to his safety if his name was released.

Chief Daniel Delaney said Friday in a statement that the department had pledged to provide information about the shooting as soon as possible when doing so would not interfere with the state police's investigation, but did not explain why releasing Covey's name now would not obstruct the inquiry.

Midlothian attorney Nick Valadez clarified that the village had decided to release Covey's name Friday in response to growing pressure from "other forces" that had requested the information.

"Given that the vitriol has died down slightly and given that the name was being batted around, speculated to, as well as the plaintiff pursuing it and amending the complaint, it just seemed to be time," he said.

Roberson's attorney Gregory Kulis, who subpoenaed the Illinois State Police for records related to the shooting—including the officer's name—but has not received the documents, said he named the officer in his amended complaint Friday because he believes the public has a right to know his name.

"With all due respect to law enforcement, if an officer gets shot, they'll announce the name of the suspect and put him on TV," Kulis said. "But here you have an innocent person get shot by the police, two months have gone by, and they won't even tell you who shot him."

ISP declined comment on the amended lawsuit and would not confirm that Covey was the officer who shot Roberson.

Covey, who is white, had reportedly been bombarded with death threats in the weeks following the fatal shooting. He did not immediately return a request for comment.

Roberson, who was black, had been working security inside Manny's Blue Room Lounge in Robbins on Nov. 11 when a fight broke out between two groups of men and shots were fired.

Amid the chaos, Roberson 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 police officer shot him dead, witnesses said.

Witnesses said the officer fired on Roberson, who was wearing garb clearly marked with the word "Security," without giving him an adequate opportunity to respond to his verbal commands.

The incident sparked protests and calls for justice by activists, who demanded the officer's immediate termination and arrest for murder.

Kulis said he had concluded Covey was the shooter based on information Midlothian police released about the officer, including his number of years on the force, his number of years spent with another department and his role with the regional SWAT team.

Covey joined the Midlothian Police Department in March 2015, after spending three years with the Crestwood

Police Department, according the Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board records. He completed "Basic SWAT School," in 2016, records show.

Kulis said Thursday, as he has argued previously in court, that state police should name the officer who shot Roberson and turn over the documents the agency has thus far withheld regarding its investigation into Roberson's shooting.

He said ISP's release of a news statement with its preliminary findings, which contradicted previously published witness accounts of the incident, entitled him to see whatever evidence the agency had used to reach its initial findings, which were attributed only to "witness statements."

"Normally, the Illinois State Police does not make any comments, issue any press releases, issue any information while an investigation is being conducted," Kulis said. "In this case, they took some moves to try and defuse the situation because this case was receiving national attention."

In contrast to published witness accounts, the ISP statement, released 2 ½ days after the shooting, said a preliminary investigation had found Roberson was wearing "plain black clothing with no markings readily identifying him as a Security Guard," and that the officer had given him "multiple verbal commands" to drop his gun and get on the ground before shooting him.

Kulis said he believes ISP's failure to release whatever evidence it used to make such preliminary statements is hindering his ability to pursue his suit on behalf of Roberson's estate.

"The Illinois State Police knows witnesses and have presumably interviewed witnesses," he said. "People come and go, people move, their memories change...so we want to strike while the irons are hot, while people are still interested in this case, to get as much information as we can."

"I think the family has a right to know what happened and the family has a right to proceed with this lawsuit."

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DETAILS

Subject:	Witnesses; Shootings; Criminal investigations; Law enforcement; Attorneys; Guards
Location:	Illinois
People:	Roberson, Jemel
Company / organization:	Name: State Police-Illinois; NAICS: 922120; Name: Twitter Inc; NAICS: 519130
Publication title:	Chicago Tribune (Online); Chicago
Publication year:	2019
Publication date:	Jan 18, 2019
Section:	Suburbs - Daily Southtown - News
Publisher:	Tribune Interactive, LLC
Place of publication:	Chicago
Country of publication:	United States, Chicago

Publication subject: General Interest Periodicals--United States

Source type: Blogs, Podcasts, & Websites

Language of publication: English

Document type: News

ProQuest document ID: 2168519881

Document URL: <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2168519881?accountid=14026>

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Last updated: 2019-01-19

Database: Global Newsstream

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