

New report does little to clear up disputed - Post and Courier, The (Charleston, SC) - May 2, 2018 - page 006

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For weeks, Greenville County authorities had withheld a report about deputies' fatal shooting of a man gripped by a mental health crisis.

But the document's release Tuesday shed little light on the authorities' tactics that have raised questions among the man's loved ones.

Jermaine Massey, 35, was shot March 19 during a confrontation with sheriff's deputies who responded to a 911 call in which Massey expressed a fear he would commit violence.

"I feel like I'm going to do something stupid," Massey said during the call. "I feel it in my ... heart. ... I feel like I'm going to kill my whole family."

Released by the Greenville County Sheriff's Office after a request from The Post and Courier, the incident report gives no detail on how the deputies handled the situation. In its primary narrative portion a deputy wrote only "I responded to the incident location."

The deputies went to Massey's Third Avenue home about 5:15 p.m. that day.

Much of the report reflected the phone call in which Massey said his children and fiancée were with him.

Massey said he "had multiple mental disabilities and was afraid that he would flip out and hurt someone," the document added.

His children are heard talking in the background. Massey told them he loved them.

"The last thing (dispatchers) heard was a small child crying," the report stated.

Sheriff Will Lewis has told The Greenville News that responding deputies approached the situation as a potential hostage crisis. They negotiated with Massey for up to 10 minutes and tried less-than-lethal tactics to bring Massey down before he charged at them behind the home, Lewis has told the newspaper. He was carrying something that looked like a butcher's knife, the sheriff said, prompting the gunfire.

The Sheriff's Office has given few other details and had refused to make public the incident report.

Lewis was suspended in April after his indictment on misconduct and obstruction charges amid an unrelated state investigation into alleged sexual harassment.

The State Law Enforcement Division also is investigating the shooting.

Massey's family members have said publicly the deputies' negotiation methods fell short. They called for increased training on how to approach mentally ill suspects.

The confrontation consisted of the authorities repeatedly shouting "Drop the knife," before they shot him, the family has said after watching police video of the ordeal.

The Post and Courier has requested access to the footage.

Tamika Gordon, a sister of Massey's, has said her brother did not charge the deputies.

"It was just a step," Gordon said, according to The Greenville News.

Lewis has said deputies are trained to keep up their guard during encounters with people wielding knives. Anybody within 30 feet can quickly close in, he said, and do serious harm.

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