

Crowd claims racism in shooting - Ypsilanti residents want probe in death of unarmed suspect

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Several angry Ypsilanti residents on Wednesday night accused police of racism and asked for an independent investigation into a fatal shooting of an unarmed suspected drug dealer who was shot in the back while fleeing police Jan. 23.

During a two-hour meeting at Ypsilanti Senior Center that drew about 50 people, criticism was directed at the Washtenaw County prosecutor for quickly clearing Ypsilanti Police Officer Uriah Hamilton of criminal charges after he shot David Ware, 29.

Prosecutor Brian Mackie announced Tuesday that the shooting, which occurred in Ypsilanti during an undercover drug operation by area police, was a justifiable homicide.

Many in the crowd, both black and white, criticized the police for shooting an unarmed man in the back.

"Murder is not the answer to the drug problem in our neighborhood," said Trey Allen of Ypsilanti.

Christopher Kelly of Ypsilanti Township, who identified himself as a cousin of Ware, told the crowd that he's lived in Washtenaw County for a while and has seen many men run from police.

"Not one has been shot in the back until Jan. 23," Kelly said.

The meeting was attended by Ypsilanti Police Chief Matt Harshberger, Michigan State Police Lt. Garth Burnside and Washtenaw County Sheriff Dan Minzey. No one from the Washtenaw County Prosecutor's Office was present. The police officials told the crowd they could provide few details of the shooting because of an ongoing court case involving another suspect in the incident.

In earlier reports, police said Ware sold suspected crack cocaine worth \$2,800 to Hamilton, who was working undercover for a Livingston and Washtenaw County Narcotics Enforcement Team. Police said Ware and a relative, Maurice Moore, 25, tried to flee when LAWNET officers moved in to arrest them.

During the police chase, according to reports, Hamilton yelled, "Stop! Don't make me shoot you!" He then fired three shots that struck Ware, authorities said. Moore faces felony charges including attempted murder.

Tyrone Bridges of Ypsilanti called Wednesday's meeting a waste of time. He said it is about "renegade cops pulling triggers on unarmed people." He suggested a picket of the Washtenaw County Prosecutor's Office.

Many in the crowd were angry that the information and reports that Mackie used to make his decision against filing charges are not available to the public. Several times, animated discussions broke out between members of the crowd and police who said they could provide little information on specifics.

Harshberger repeatedly told the crowd that police investigations are slow, but in time all the information would be available and they could talk more openly then. Harshberger said there also will be an internal review of his department's policies.

Chuck Ream of Scio Township showed up because he was concerned with the shooting. He told the crowd that if Ware was white, he would not have been shot.

Juanita House of Ypsilanti was one of many residents who were concerned with police firing on suspects in neighborhoods.

"We don't want our residential neighborhoods turning into gun battles," she said after the meeting. "That is very scary. There were a lot of unanswered questions here."

At one point in the meeting, Kelly stood up and addressed Minzey. "Is this your solution to jail overcrowding?" he asked. "It may sound sarcastic to you. It's real to me."

Robert Hunter was one of a handful that called for the independent investigation.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself to shoot someone in the back over drugs," Hunter told the three law enforcement officials.

Harshberger said an independent investigation would have to be authorized by the City Council.

Ypsilanti Mayor Paul Schreiber attended the meeting and said he was open to the possibility of an independent investigation. But he said the council needed to review all the reports before making a decision.

Schreiber said he was also frustrated with the length of time it took for the investigations to be completed.

Also attending the meeting were relatives of Clifton Lee Jr., who died June 1 during a struggle with Washtenaw County Sheriff's deputies after he tried to intervene in a traffic stop involving a relative in Ypsilanti Township. The prosecutor's office has yet to rule on whether charges will be filed in that death.

"This effects everybody in this whole community," said John Lee, a brother of Clifton Lee Jr.

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