

Stop Police Taser Abuse Press Conference Today

Written by Paradise Gray ID4516
Tuesday, 02 September 2008 01:41 -

Third Police Taser Incident in Three Weeks Prompts Demands from Human Rights Groups

A group of organizations that came together following the death of Andre Thomas to support his family and the residents of Swissvale in their quest for truth and justice are again joining forces in response to the questionable Tasing of Jason Schmidt on August 22nd and the announcement that same day that North Braddock Borough had settled for \$100,000 the suit brought by Shawn Hicks, who last year was Tasered three times by police who came into his house unannounced while he was asleep on his couch. In his suit, Hicks said police, who claimed they thought he was a burglar, continued to Taser him even after he offered to show them his ID.

The groups plan a press conference and march beginning at noon Tuesday, September 2, outside the office of District Attorney Stephen Zappala at the County Courthouse in downtown Pittsburgh.

"The concerns we expressed after Andre Thomas died have not been fully addressed," said Black and White Reunion spokesperson Celeste Taylor. "Now another young man has been Tasered under questionable circumstances. We applaud District Attorney Stephen Zappala and Medical Examiner Karl Williams for convening a committee to examine the physical effects of Tasers, but that is not enough. All police officers involved in both the Thomas and Schmidt tragedies should be removed from their duties pending the outcome of an independent investigation. One young man is dead and another is hospitalized in a coma. Their families and the residents of these communities deserve to know why, based on facts."

Added David Meieran, of Stop Taser Abuse Today (STAT!), "Nationwide, more than 360 people have died after being Tasered. The U.N. Committee Against Torture has declared that Tasers are in violation of the U.N. Convention Against Torture, and Amnesty International has called for a moratorium on their use. Rather than continue business as usual, we demand a moratorium on the use of Tasers until it can be demonstrated that their medical implications are sufficiently understood and that police have acceptable use-of-force policies in place. Taser International boasts that their product is 'safer than Tylenol.'" Well, the same burden of proof should apply in the case of Tasers that does with Tylenol."

The Black and White Reunion and its partnering organizations reiterate the demands in their

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August 25th letter to law enforcement officials and are now adding additional concerns that should be taken up by the newly formed committee:

1. The newly formed Allegheny County committee of law enforcement and medical professionals must have access to the factual information about Taser and use-of-force policies in EACH police department in Allegheny County. We ask that the District Attorney compile this information and make it available to the public immediately.

2. In light of the Andre Thomas and Jason Schmidt cases, the committee should examine, in addition to the physical effects of Tasers, the existing police policies, procedures, and training in their use, and recommend changes to safeguard the public against their misuse. All members of the newly formed committee should review the reports about Taser/use-of-force policies from Amnesty International, which has called for a moratorium on Taser use.

3. In order to increase public support and expand its knowledge base, the committee should invite residents and activists, and representatives of the University of Pittsburgh and Duquesne University law schools to participate. At minimum, the committee should make a complete and public report of its findings.

4. Because in two recent cases there were indications that the victim might have been mentally ill and/or experiencing a reaction to prescribed or illegal drugs, the committee must include mental health and law enforcement professionals with expertise in appropriate responses to individuals in these types of distress. We believe that there are better, more humane ways to manage these situations than to risk killing or disabling the victim with Tasers, and we believe police policies, procedures, and training should reflect best practices.

5. There should be a countywide moratorium on the use of Tasers until the committee has completed its study and released its findings. If it is determined that it is possible to use Tasers safely, the moratorium should continue until appropriate public policies, procedures, and training are in place. If it is determined that it is NOT possible to assure safe use of Tasers regardless of policies, procedures, and training, their use should be discontinued entirely.

We join with the families in demanding forthright, honorable, and compassionate responses to the death of Mr. Thomas, the disability of Mr. Schmidt, and the countless injuries and deaths

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that have resulted from improper use of Tasers.

We ask again that the appropriate law enforcement and criminal justice authorities report publicly what actions they intend to take to address these issues.

The Black and White Reunion

and the

Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP)

Billy Jackson

NAACP Pittsburgh Branch

Paradise Gray, One HOOD

Stop Taser Abuse Today! (STAT!)

9/2/08 at 5pm

What: Stop Police Taser Abuse Press Conference

When: Today/Tues. September 2, 2008 @ 5pm

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Where: Outside of the Office of Allegheny County DA Stephen Zappala

303 County Courthouse

436 Grant St.,

Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Who: Various Human Rights Groups

Contacts: Celeste Taylor: 412-670-0937

David Meieran: 412-216-9821

Paradise Gray

One Hood

[Http://www.1hood.org](http://www.1hood.org)

[Http://www.myspace.com/paradisegray](http://www.myspace.com/paradisegray)