

Baltimore Lieutenant Acquitted in Freddie Gray Case

A Baltimore police lieutenant was acquitted of manslaughter and two other charges in the April 2015 death of black detainee Freddie Gray, dealing prosecutors another setback in their efforts to secure a conviction in the highly charged case.

Baltimore City Circuit Court Judge Barry Williams found Lieutenant Brian Rice not guilty in a bench trial. Rice, 42, was the highest-ranking officer charged after Gray's death from a broken neck suffered in a police transport van.

His death triggered protests and rioting in the mainly black city and stoked a national debate about how police treat minorities.

The controversy flared anew this month with the deaths of African-American men at the hands of police in Minnesota and Louisiana. Tensions were heightened further after police officers were killed in Dallas and Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake asked the community to continue to respect the judicial process during "a very difficult time for our city."

The scene outside the courthouse in Baltimore on Monday was calm, with only a handful of protesters.

Rice was the fourth of six officers to stand trial in the case. Williams previously acquitted Officers Edward Nero and Caesar Goodson Jr., both of whom were in court on Monday.

In a statement, Rawlings-Blake said Rice would still face a departmental review.

Officer William Porter faces a September retrial after a jury deadlocked.

Rice, who is white, ordered two officers on bicycle to chase Gray, 25, when he fled unprovoked in a high-crime area.

Prosecutors said Rice acted negligently by failing to place Gray in a seat belt.

But defense lawyers said Rice was allowed leeway on how to secure a prisoner. The officer made the correct split-second decision while Gray was being combative and a hostile crowd looked on, they said.

Williams, who heard the case without a jury at Rice's request, said prosecutors failed to show the lieutenant was aware of a departmental policy requiring seat belts for prisoners during transport.

"A mere error in judgment is not enough to show corruption," the judge said. Rice had faced charges of involuntary manslaughter, reckless endangerment and misconduct in office.

The verdict could renew calls from police union leaders to drop charges against the remaining officers.

In addition to Porter's retrial, Officer Garrett Miller is scheduled for trial later this month, while Sergeant Alicia White's trial is set for October.

Warren Alperstein, a Baltimore defense attorney who attended the trial as a spectator, said he was "not surprised by the verdict whatsoever."

"At the end of the day, the state may have to say we're cutting our losses and moving on," he said. {eo}

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