

Why Did Police Gun Down This Black Christian Musician?

The family of a church musician who was fatally shot by a plain-clothes police officer in Florida over the weekend is urging police to release surveillance video from street cameras, family attorney Benjamin Crump told CNN on Wednesday.

Corey Jones, 31, was waiting for a tow truck on the side of a road at 3 a.m. on Sunday after his car broke down when a Palm Beach Gardens officer in an unmarked van approached him, Crump said.

“What he needed from the police was a helping hand and all he got was bullets,” Crump said. “This is a situation that cries out for answers, it cries out for transparency,” he added.

Jones, a drummer who performed in local churches and a reggae band, was black. The police officer, Nouman Raja, 38, is Asian, according to state law enforcement records.

Florida Governor Rick Scott on Wednesday said the Florida Department of Law Enforcement would assist the Palm Beach County Sheriff’s Office in an investigation of the shooting.

Crump said Raja did not appear to have followed regulations.

The officer did not call for backup or advise his department that he was going to approach the vehicle, Crump said, suggesting Jones may have had no idea Raja was a police officer.

“His family believes he went to his grave not knowing who this person was,” added Crump, a high-profile Florida lawyer who represented the family of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed high school student who was killed in 2012 by a volunteer night watchman in Florida.

Palm Beach Gardens police say Raja shot Jones when he stopped to investigate what he thought was an abandoned car and was confronted by an armed subject.

Police say a handgun found at the scene was purchased by Jones three days earlier. Jones' family confirmed he bought it for protection, Crump said.

Raja was on duty at the time of the shooting, police said, investigating a string of burglaries in Palm Beach Gardens, a wealthy city of gated communities a few miles north of Palm Beach.

He joined the Palm Beach Garden police in April and previously worked for seven years at the police department in Atlantis, a small town south of Palm Beach, according to records released by police.

Raja had a relatively unblemished record on the force, apart from a written warning in 2011 after he had to be told to halt a police chase, according to official documents.

Jones was driving home to Boynton Beach after a gig with the band, Future Prezidents, when his car broke down, his family told WPBF TV station.

Crump urged police to release any surveillance video they may have.

"We don't know how many times he was shot. We don't know whether he was shot in the back," the lawyer said.

Palm Beach Gardens police said there was no dashboard-camera footage, and its officers are not equipped with body cameras.

Crump described Jones as a God-fearing man who was inspirational to those he came in contact with. Friends said he played drums in several bands and churches in the area and worked for a local housing authority.

“I just doesn’t seem right at all. Corey’s the most peaceful, loving, warm person I’ve ever met,” band member Boris Simeonov told the Palm Beach Post. “I never saw him get frustrated or upset at anyone or anything.” {eoa}

© 2015 Thomson Reuters. All rights reserved.