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Forum discusses police brutality

Akron committee hears complaints, talks about plans to hire auditor

By Jeffrey E. McCants

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It started as a night out to see the Fourth of July fireworks in downtown Akron.

But Copley Township resident Marques Jones, a 20-year-old student at Kent State, said he ended up getting pushed around by police officers trying to disperse the crowd.

And when he questioned the officers about the rough treatment, which included one of his cousins being sprayed with pepper spray, Jones said, he found himself being handcuffed and shot with a stun gun.

Jones was among dozens of people attending Tuesday night's forum -- sponsored by the Anti-Police Brutality Committee -- at the Oliver Ocasek State Office Building in Akron.

Jones, whose case is pending in Akron Municipal Court, was charged with misdemeanor counts of disorderly conduct, failure to disperse and resisting arrest, according to court records.

"I didn't raise (him) to be afraid of the police," said his mother, Lorraine Jones, 51, of Akron.

The forum provided a platform for residents to discuss the issue of police brutality and plans for the city of Akron to hire a police auditor to investigate such charges.

"We want to know where we stand," said adviser to the committee Gregory Harrison, a 40-year-old retired police officer from the Akron department. "We want to get some answers from city officials.

"We still don't have an effective system to monitor police misconduct in the community."

Akron City Council President Marco Summerville said the hiring of a police auditor has not become a reality yet because Mayor Don Plusquellic has not found the right person for the job.

But Summerville said a police auditor will be hired.

Many in attendance at the forum said they themselves or people they know have been treated unfairly, singled out because they are minorities, by police officers in the Akron area.

And some in the audience questioned the professionalism and abilities of some police officers.

Michael Madden, deputy chief of the investigative subdivision for the Akron Police Department, offered to meet privately with anyone in the audience to discuss the status of criminal cases that were brought up during the forum.

The committee encouraged those in attendance to always file a complaint if they encounter problems with a police officer.

“Nothing is going to happen if you don't lodge a complaint,” said Harrison.

The Rev. Stephen Muhammad, 38, of the Nation of Islam Mosque No. 37 in Akron, said he was disappointed that Plusquellic did not attend the forum.

“I don't think the situation is being looked at,” he said.

Muhammad said a police auditor needs to be hired.

“If there is no one there to check them (the police), they (the residents) are going to have some problems where they live,” he said.

The committee hopes to host a second forum in late August.

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