

Attorney: Elgin police shooting 'tragic, unjustified and unconstitutional'



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A federal civil rights lawsuit filed by the family of a woman shot and killed by Elgin police states officers knew she was having a mental health crisis and used excessive force.

Decynthia Clements, 34, was killed March 12 after she had an hourlong standoff with police along Interstate 90. Body camera video shows officers asked Clements several times to exit her sport utility vehicle. They approached the vehicle after she lit a fire inside. Clements exited

her vehicle holding a steak knife, took one step and was shot three times by Lt. Christian Jensen.

The lawsuit filed Wednesday morning in the U.S. District Court, names Jensen, up to 10 other unnamed officers at the scene, and the city of Elgin as defendants.

The officers knew Clements had a history of bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, was having a mental health crisis and was possibly suicidal March 12, the lawsuit states. A Cook County medical examiner's report later determined Clements had cocaine and benzoylecgonine, a metabolite of cocaine, in her bloodstream.

Jensen used excessive force and acted "intentionally, willfully, with malice, and with reckless indifference" to Clements' constitutional rights, the lawsuit alleges. The other officers on the scene, identified with a collective "John Doe 1-10," failed to intervene, the lawsuit states.

Clements family attorney Andrew M. Stroth called the shooting "tragic, unjustified and unconstitutional" during a news conference Wednesday outside the Elgin Police Department.

Elgin spokeswoman Molly Center said Wednesday morning the city had not seen the lawsuit "and will provide further comment when the time is appropriate."

"The city understands and respects the Clements family's need for answers and asks for patience while the state police completes its investigation and the Cook County state's attorney conducts its review," Center said.

The lawsuit was filed by Clements' brother and sister-in-law, Chevelle and Holly Clements of Elgin. It seeks at least \$50,000 for each of the eight counts for medical and funeral expenses, along with attorney's fees, punitive damages, and "any further relief" deemed fair by the court.

Officers had nonlethal options available to them including Tasers and rubber bullets, attorney Antonio M. Romanucci said.

"The officers calculated a plan to get her out of her car and that calculated plan included Decynthia possibly coming out of her car with a knife ..." Romanucci said. "Everybody followed that plan except one officer."

"Our family cannot begin to explain the horror" of what they experienced, Chevelle Clements said.

Eric Russell, executive director of Tree of Life Justice League Illinois in Chicago, called Jensen a "racist killer cop."

"Our community is absolutely outraged by the execution of Decynthia Clements," Russell said.

Jensen, a 19-year veteran of the department, received six complaints during his career in Elgin. Two of the complaints allege excessive use of force and none were sustained after internal review. All complaints in which Jensen is named include other officers.

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