

Tanisha Anderson's mother says punishment of Cleveland officers 'unfair,' union to challenge discipline

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CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Tanisha Anderson's mother called the discipline handed down Monday to two Cleveland police officers involved in her daughter's death unfairly lenient while the police union that represents the officers vowed to fight what it considers a harsh punishment.

The reactions came shortly after Cleveland Public Safety Director Michael McGrath [handed down a 10-day suspension](#) for Officer Scott Aldridge and a written reprimand for Officer Brian Myers for their roles in Anderson's November 2014 death.

Anderson's mother, Cassandra Johnson, said she was upset about the three-year investigation and everything that led up to Monday's decision.

"We know they don't put police officers in jail, but 10 days?" Johnson said. "What am I supposed to do about that? My daughter is dead and they're talking about 10 days."

Myers and Aldridge were both disciplined for failing to notify Cleveland EMS in a timely manner, according to their disciplinary letters.

A Cuyahoga County grand jury in February [declined to indict](#) the two officers, paving the way for the city to issue its discipline. The city previously paid Anderson's family \$2.25 million to settle a wrongful death lawsuit.

Cleveland Police Patrolmen's Association Jeff Follmer said he believes the 10-day suspension is too harsh. He said he will file grievance on behalf of Aldridge, who was Myers' training officer at the time of the incident. He said the union maintains that neither officer did anything wrong.

An arbitrator will hear arguments from both sides and render a decision, a process that typically takes months.

The officers "had to make a split decision," Follmer said. "These family members were with Tanisha the whole time. They knew about her mental illness. She had heart problems. I don't know where this falls to police officers when it's just a split-moment decision."

Anderson died during the Nov. 13, 2014 incident. Several agencies would investigate the case over the next three-plus years. The Ohio Attorney General said by the time they received the case from the Cuyahoga County Sheriff more than two years after Anderson's death that it had turned into a "complicated legal mess."

That included two autopsies, one that ruled Anderson's death a homicide and a second one that she died from a "cardiac event."

The second autopsy was ordered after the Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner used protected information called Garrity material in determining Anderson's cause of death. That material came from Cleveland police's internal affairs investigation that is not allowed to be used in a criminal investigation.

A judge ordered the second autopsy. Montgomery County Coroner Dr. Kent Harshbarger ruled that she died from a "cardiac event." He found that one of Anderson's arteries was 70 to 80 percent closed and another was 50 percent closed. Anderson suffered from heart disease and was taking prescription medication -- Risperidol/risperidone-- that increased her risk of a heart attack.

He reported that the autopsy did not show any significant injuries, other than a chest injury that was likely caused when paramedics gave her CPR. Harshbarger also noted that Anderson had several other medical issues, including diabetes, obesity and bipolar disorder.

But the delay hindered the attorney general's ability to interview or re-interview witnesses. Some witnesses were uncooperative, including some of Anderson's family members and a Cleveland police sergeant, according to the attorney general's report on the case.

That resulted in the attorney general's office being unable to exactly pinpoint what happened when the Anderson and the officers scuffled and how long she sat handcuffed before an ambulance arrived to take her to the hospital, where she died about an hour later.

Johnson disputed Harshbarger's findings, saying that she would have known if her daughter had been taking medication for heart disease. She said she often gave her daughter medication for her mental illness.

"This just takes everything away from life: joy, happiness, peace," Johnson said. "It takes it all away. That was my daughter. She meant the world to me."