



Empowerment, Education, Accountability

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 19, 2017

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Community Organization Demands Investigation of Police Brutality at South Gwinnett High

The Gwinnett Parent Coalition to Dismantle the School to Prison Pipeline (Gwinnett STOPP) is investigating a brutal arrest at South Gwinnett High School that left a junior bloodied and unconscious on the floor.

Gwinnett STOPP founder Marlyn Tillman said Tuesday that she was alerted about the incident when a photo of the unconscious student began trending on social media. The photo was taken on Feb. 7 at South Gwinnett High School when Gwinnett County School resource officers responded aggressively to an argument between two students.

Now, Tillman, and members of her organization, want Gwinnett County Schools to investigate the incident and fire the officers involved. Her organization is holding a press conference at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 20, at Gwinnett County Schools' Instructional Support Center at 437 Old Peachtree Road in Suwanee. The Gwinnett County School Board meeting will be held in the building at 7 p.m. Dozens of parent protesters are expected to attend and speak out against the use of excessive force against students on school grounds. Some will also speak at the meeting.

The incident in question, according to a Gwinnett County Schools police report, occurred when School Resource Officer Wes Hardin, who is seven-feet-tall and nearly 280 pounds, and Officer Carlos Floyd responded to a call for assistance to break up a fight at 2288 East Main Street in Snellville.

A student whose first name "Jamal" is being used since he is a minor, was injured in the incident, Tillman said.

When Hardin arrived on the scene, Tillman said several students "were beefing, but not fighting," according to a student witness.

"A witness said Officer Hardin, who has a history of slamming students to the ground, was pushing kids around and was trying to grab those involved," she said.

As Officer Hardin was handcuffing a student, Officer Floyd arrived on scene and used a foot maneuver to "take down" the junior named "Jamal", Tillman said. He fell so violently that he left a pool of blood on the ground, she said.

"A witness told me that Officer Floyd grabbed Jamal up and slammed him against the wall," Tillman said. "Jamal was unable to stand on his feet because he was beginning to lose consciousness and started to fall down. Officer Floyd then slammed him to the ground, which is the scene in the picture."

Tillman said that several students involved in the incident, including the unconscious junior "Jamal" and those who tried to break up the argument, were suspended, arrested, and sent to a Gwinnett Schools alternative school.

The school police officers are still working in the system. Tillman has requested the personnel files for the officers. Officer Hardin was accused of breaking the arm of a special education student during a take down about nine years ago. The incident was investigated by Gwinnett County Schools' Police Chief Wayne Rikard. Hardin did not face disciplinary action in the incident.

"The School Resource Officer who injured this student should be held accountable for the use of excessive force the same as any other police officer," said Kathleen Burch, an attorney and professor at John Marshall Law School in Atlanta, and a member of Gwinnett STOPP. "No student should end the school day on the ground unconscious and bleeding because of the actions of the School Resource Officer.

"School officials' refusal to determine who was responsible for the fight because it is easier to punish everyone denies the victim their right to due process," Burch adds. "Last year, the Georgia Court of Appeals said that school zero tolerance policies that punish students for fighting on school grounds when the student is acting in self-defense violates Georgia law."

Tillman said she will not stop pushing for answers in this case. "Police brutality will not be tolerated," she said.

Gwinnett STOPP is a grassroots parent-driven organization focused on dismantling the school to prison pipeline in Gwinnett County. Gwinnett STOPP seeks to build and strengthen relationships within the community by increasing public awareness of the injustice that all children face within the educational system as it relates to the pipeline and by promoting policy changes through data accountability and fact-based incident reporting.

For more information on the Gwinnett Parent Coalition to Dismantle the School to Prison Pipeline visit www.gwinnettstopp.org.

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