

Lawyer for Slain Teen's Family Asks Police for All the Evidence; Alexandria Officer's Shooting of Latino Youth Sparks Concern

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Saying he wants "every last detail," the lawyer for the family of a youth slain Monday in a confrontation with an Alexandria police officer asked city officials yesterday to release all evidence in the case.

The shooting of 16-year-old Jimmy J. Lopez, a native of El Salvador who recently moved to the area, has generated concerns within the area's Latino community. Several leaders and the boy's family met with police Thursday.

"You have questions about any police shooting, but especially when the victim is a 16-year-old boy with no criminal record," said John C. Kiyonaga, a lawyer who represents Lopez's family.

Lopez was shot twice in the upper body by a police officer who repeatedly ordered him to drop a metal belt he was swinging in a parking lot, police said. The officer, Joseph H. Seskey, fired five shots at Lopez during the confrontation in the 4300 block of Duke Street, police said.

Police said they have eight witnesses who say that Lopez kept approaching the officer despite orders to stop. Seskey first fired two bursts of a pepper-based spray, hitting Lopez both times, but the youth kept coming, police said.

Although the family was pleased that police officials met with them, Kiyonaga said that many troubling questions remain. Police have not given a full accounting of the shots and wounds, released any names of witnesses, or provided information about Seskey's record in five years on the force.

Sgt. Steven J. Mason, a department spokesman, said that results of the autopsy are pending, that Seskey's record is a personnel matter not available for release, and that the witnesses' names will not be shared while police are in the midst of conducting their own investigation into what took place.

Mason also would not say whether Lopez had a criminal record.

Alexandria City Attorney Philip G. Sunderland said he will turn over documents and evidence related to the shooting to the Lopez family once the police have completed their investigation.

In the meantime, Seskey has been placed on administrative duties.

The incident, the first fatal police shooting in Alexandria since August 1992, unfolded about 11 p.m. Monday, moments after police received two calls about someone swinging a chain in the parking lot and smashing car windows.

Seskey, 26, was the first officer on the scene and immediately called for Lopez to surrender, police said. According to Kiyonaga, the incident escalated in just 72 seconds, with Seskey opening fire with his semiautomatic pistol just outside the entrance of a video store.

It was only after the gunfire that back-up officers arrived, police said.

Lopez, who was raised by his grandparents in San Miguel, El Salvador, came to the United States in 1990 to live with his father in New York City, relatives said.

He returned to El Salvador last year to visit his grandparents and, upon returning to the United States, decided to move in with an aunt in Alexandria.

The teenager quit school after the eighth grade to begin working as a day laborer, according to his father, Oscar Lopez.

"He wanted to have some money," the father said yesterday. "He seemed happy all the time. He was a good kid."

Police said witnesses have told them that Lopez had been drinking since 8 p.m. on Monday.

A tenant of an apartment complex next to the shopping strip said that Lopez tried to rob him moments before the incident with the police.

The man, 33, who asked not to be identified, said in an interview that Lopez was wildly swinging the belt at him and cut his finger.

Even so, said Pedro Aviles, executive director of the Latino Civil Rights Task Force, Seskey might have taken other action.

"The kid was not going anywhere," Aviles said yesterday. "Why shoot to kill?"

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