

Family didn't know of man's burial

Body exhumed months after he was struck by police SUV

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RAYMOND, Miss. – The body of a Mississippi man who died after being hit by a police SUV driven by an off-duty officer was exhumed Monday, months after officials failed to notify his family of his death.

At a news conference, civil rights attorney Ben Crump, local leaders and family members of 37-year-old Dexter Wade said they had hired an independent medical examiner to perform an autopsy on the man's body. They will also give him a proper funeral. While Dexter Wade's remains were released Monday, his family said officials failed to honor the agreed-upon time approved by a county attorney for exhuming the body.

"Now, I ask, can I exhume my child and try to get some peace and try to get a state of mind," said Dexter Wade's mother, Bettersten Wade. "Now y'all take that from me. I couldn't even see him come out of the ground."

Dexter Wade's family members, his attorneys and other witnesses said they did not get to see the exhumation because it took place hours before county officials said it would. In a letter, a copy of which was reviewed by The Associated Press, Hinds County Board Attorney Tony Gaylor told Dennis Sweet, one of Bettersten Wade's attorneys, that the body would be exhumed at 11:30 a.m.

Gaylor did not immediately respond to emails and phone calls requesting comment.

The Rev. Ronald Moore of Stronger Hope Baptist Church said he arrived at the cemetery near the Hinds County Penal Farm in the Jackson suburb of Raymond around 10:30 a.m. He said officials told him the body was already gone. Then he was told the body still might be there. But Moore, Dexter Wade's family and the attorneys didn't see the body until hours later, after it was exhumed.

"It's a low-down dirty shame what happened today," Crump said. "What happened to Dexter Wade in March and what happened to Dexter Wade here today reeks to the high heavens."



Surrounded by family members and holding hands with civil rights attorney Ben Crump, center right, Bettersten Wade watches as her son's body is transferred after being exhumed from a pauper's cemetery Monday near the Hinds County Penal Farm in Raymond, Miss. ROGELIO V. SOLIS/AP

Bettersten Wade last saw her son when he left home on March 5, Crump said. She filed a missing persons report a few days later. Bettersten Wade said it was late August before she learned her son had been killed by a Jackson Police Department vehicle as he crossed Interstate 55 the day she last saw him.

A coroner identified Dexter Wade partly from a bottle of prescription medication he had with him, and the coroner called a medical clinic to get information about his next of kin, Crump said. The coroner was unable to reach Bettersten Wade but told Jackson police multiple times to contact her, Crump said.

Dexter Wade was buried in a pauper's cemetery before the family was notified of his death, NBC News reported.

City officials, including Jackson Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba, have said the episode was an accident and that

there was no malicious intent. On Monday, Crump repeated his call for a U.S. Department of Justice investigation into the circumstances surrounding Dexter Wade's death and its aftermath. That call was repeated Monday by U.S. Rep. Bennie Thompson, whose district includes most of Jackson.

"The system owes Mr. Wade's family an explanation for the callous manner in which his untimely death was mishandled," Thompson said in a statement.

A funeral will be conducted Nov. 20.

On Monday, Bettersten Wade wanted to see her son's body lifted from the ground. Instead, she had to settle for seeing it lifted from the back of the coroner's vehicle into a funeral home hearse.

"They put him in the ground without my permission," Bettersten Wade said. "They dug him up without my permission."

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