

Connecticut trooper acquitted in shooting death of Black student

Victim's family offered to settle suit against officers

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

A white Connecticut state trooper was acquitted of all charges Friday in the death of Mubarak Soulemane, a Black 19-year-old community college student who was shot as he sat behind the wheel of a stopped stolen car holding a kitchen knife and apparently in the throes of a mental health crisis.

Trooper Brian North, 33, could have faced up to 40 years in prison if he had been convicted of first-degree manslaughter in the Jan. 15, 2020, shooting. The state's inspector general said the shooting shouldn't have happened because North and other officers were not in imminent danger. But the six-person jury in Milford acquitted him on that charge and two lesser counts: second-degree manslaughter and negligent homicide.

North showed little emotion as the verdicts were read. Afterward, he shook hands with his lawyers and hugged the head of the state police union. North didn't comment while leaving court, but his lead attorney, Frank Riccio II, said the trooper is still shaken by the shooting.

"This is not something that he will ever live down, because it was a very traumatic experience," Riccio said. "The verdict is obviously favorable for him, but it doesn't change what happened on Jan. 15."

Relatives and friends of Soulemane, including his mother and sister, declined to comment while leaving the courthouse. Mark Arons, a lawyer for the family, said they were devastated by the verdict.

"We have questions about whether justice was fully done and received here," Arons said. "The trooper gets to live his life and Mubarak's never coming back."

He said the verdict marked another tragedy for the family, but that it wouldn't affect the family's lawsuit against North and the other officers at the scene that day. Soulemane's mother,



Mubarak Soulemane who was shot by a Connecticut state police trooper as he sat behind the wheel of a stolen car holding a kitchen knife. Brian North, the state police trooper, was acquitted of manslaughter in Milford, Conn., Friday.

OMO MOHAMMED VIA AP



North

Omo Mohammad, offered to settle the wrongful death case for \$13 million.

"They've had to relive through the trial all the horrific events that unfolded that terrible afternoon, early evening. And then to hear the acquittal on all the three counts, it's a tragic loss all over again."

The case caught the attention of the local NAACP and the Rev. Al Sharpton, but race was not raised as a factor in the shooting during the trial.

Scot X. Esdaile, president of the Connecticut State Conference of the NAACP, called the acquittal "a major atrocity."

"Very disappointing. It's a huge setback. Shame on the jury," Esdaile said by phone. "They didn't have to murder this young man. I think this is a disgusting decision."

On the day of the shooting, North fired his handgun seven times at close range into the car's driver's window after Soulemane led police on a high-speed chase through several towns on

Interstate 95. The shooting happened less than a minute after the car crashed into another vehicle in West Haven, ending the chase, and police surrounded the car.

North testified that he fired when Soulemane pulled out a 9-inch knife and made a threatening movement. He said he believed Soulemane posed a danger to police officers who were on the other side of the car and had just broken the passenger door window.

But Inspector General Robert Devlin, who investigates all police uses of deadly force in the state, said no officers were in danger because the stolen car was boxed in and Soulemane couldn't go anywhere.

He said officers made no attempt to de-escalate the situation.

The state police union, meanwhile, criticized Devlin for charging North, saying he had been forced to make a split-second decision and believed he was protecting other officers.

In the lawsuit against the officers, Soulemane's mother, Omo Mohammad, offered to settle the wrongful death case for \$13 million.