

Ill. deputy arrested in death of Black woman

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REUTERS

A former Illinois sheriff's deputy pleaded not guilty to murder on Thursday, according to court documents, one day after he was fired, arrested and charged in the fatal shooting of a 36-year-old Black woman during a call for help at her home.

Sean Grayson, 30, fired three shots, striking Sonya Massey one time in the face as she ducked for cover behind a kitchen counter separating the two, according to court documents. The shooting followed a verbal exchange about a pot on the stove.

Massey, a mother of two teenagers, had called police regarding a suspected intruder in her Springfield home, said Ben Crump, the prominent U.S. civil rights lawyer representing the family. It is the latest in a running list of high-profile police killings of Black people, including George Floyd, Trayvon Martin and Roger Fortson, that Crump has counseled.

"While nothing can undo the heinous actions of this officer, we hope the scales of justice will continue to hold him accountable and we will demand transparency at every step," Crump said in a statement.

A grand jury indicted Grayson, who is white, on five charges, including three counts of murder in the first degree, one count of aggravated battery and one count of official misconduct.

He was arraigned in Illinois' 7th Judicial Circuit Court on Thursday and pleaded not guilty to all charges. He was jailed until his next court date on Aug. 26.

Grayson's attorney, Daniel Fultz, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Grayson and another Sangamon County sheriff's deputy were called to Massey's home for a suspected prowler at 12:50 a.m. July 6. About 30 minutes later, Massey was shot.

According to the indictment, Massey had placed a pot of possibly hot water on the counter on Grayson's instructions. Grayson was in the living room when he then drew his firearm and threatened to shoot Massey in the face, prompting her to put her hands in the air, say, "I'm sorry," and duck for cover



Donna Massey mourns the loss of her daughter Sonya, who was shot and killed by sheriff's deputies on July 6, during a protest in Springfield, Ill., last week. THOMAS J. TURNEY/SPRINGFIELD STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER VIA REUTERS

behind a counter separating the two.

Grayson moved closer, yelled at Massey to put the pot down and opened fire, the document said. He then activated his body camera, though his partner's camera was activated upon arriving on the scene. He is twice her size, according to court files.

Grayson did not render aid and discouraged the other deputy from providing help.

The second deputy, who was not named, stayed by Massey until medics arrived. She was pronounced dead at St. John's Hospital.

The family has viewed body-camera footage, which officials plan to release on Monday with minimal redactions, according to State's Attorney John Milhiser.

The shooting was investigated by the Illinois State Police. The Sangamon County Sheriff's Office said on Wednesday it fired Grayson after the investigation found he did not follow proper training and standards.

"With our badge we accept enormous responsibility, and if that responsibility is abused, there should be consequences," the office said in a post on Facebook.

Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker said in a statement Massey deserved protection rather than being "gunned down."

"My heart breaks for Sonya's children, for her family and friends and for all who knew and loved her, and I am enraged that another innocent Black woman had her life taken from her at the hands of a police officer," he said.