2nd arrest made in Mississippi hanging death

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Jackson, Mississippi, police have arrested a second suspect in the death of Tasia Fortune and are seeking a third, Police Chief RaShall Brackney told the Jackson City Council on Sept. 22.

Earnest Lloyd Jr., 25, is charged with murder, Brackney said after the meeting. Police have asked the U.S. Marshals Service to help locate another suspect who has an outstanding arrest warrant.

Brackney declined to identify the person being sought, saying she wanted to give marshals time to locate the suspect before releasing a name.

'I will guarantee you there are actually more arrests to come in this incident,' Brackney told council members.

Fortune, a Black 29-year-old woman, was found dead and hanging from a tree at a vacant house Aug. 3. Her death has drawn national attention and renewed scrutiny of other Black Mississippians found hanging in recent years.

The first man charged in the case pleaded not guilty Sept. 14 in the death of Fortune. Jarques Ratliff, 51, appeared in Jackson Municipal Court, where a judge denied bond after determining he was a flight risk. Ratliff was arrested Sept. 11, and he was charged with murder. Ratliff and Lloyd are Black.

During the court hearing, investigators referenced an affidavit alleging that Ratliff used 'a black cable cord' to hang Fortune from a tree.

Authorities have not publicly disclosed a motive. Ratliff’s attorney, Toney Baldwin, said his client is innocent and that no evidence has been shown yet that presents a complete picture of what occurred.

'We ask the press and the public not to prejudge until we get the entirety of the evidence,' Baldwin said.

Brackney’s update came during a discussion about armed groups that had come to Jackson in response to concerns about Fortune’s death and other reported hanging deaths.

Ward 3 Councilman Kenneth Stokes raised the issue after describing an encounter on what he recalled was Sept. 18.

Stokes said he had left a bank and was heading home when he saw people gathering in front of a park with what he described as 'AKs.'

Stokes said he did not know to which group they belonged. He expressed concern about armed people walking through the neighborhood and how that would affect older residents watching from their homes.

'That was a scary situation that I saw,' Stokes said.

Stokes said he placed the issue on the agenda because he wanted guidelines for groups marching through Jackson neighborhoods with weapons. He characterized what he saw as private police coming

into neighborhoods and questioned how residents would respond if members of the Ku Klux Klan did the same thing in a poor Black neighborhood.

'We cannot have private police in Jackson. We have a police department,' Stokes said.

Brackney responded that police had received information that the Black Panthers were coming to Jackson in connection with Fortune's case and concerns about reported hanging deaths throughout Mississippi. She then announced the new arrest and outstanding warrant.

Two weeks earlier, activist Celina Charles interrupted the council's Sept. 8 meeting, demanding answers about Fortune's death and accusing city and state leaders of failing to address what she called 'the lynching problem in Jackson, Mississippi.'

Asked after the meeting about the Black Panthers and the Fred Hampton Gun Club, Brackney described their activity as a 'walking presence' in response to what they believed could be lynchings or hangings in the South.

Brackney told council members the Fred Hampton Gun Club came from Atlanta. She said Jackson Police coordinated with the FBI and Secret Service to assess potential threats.

Council members questioned whether the groups needed a permit and how police responded to people carrying weapons through the city. Brackney said officers were in the area monitoring the activity.

Brackney said people walking on sidewalks without blocking streets would not need a special events permit. Requests to close streets, block intersections or waive the noise ordinance would require one, she said.

Based on what police had heard about and observed, Brackney said, the activity would not necessarily have required a permit. If officers identified violations of the city's special events ordinances, she said, police would send notices to the people responsible once they could identify them.

Councilman Kevin Parkinson urged state lawmakers to reconsider laws allowing people to openly carry firearms.

'The Second Amendment is one thing, but I think even responsible gun owners support common sense legislation,' Parkinson said.

Brackney said Mississippi allows open carry and cautioned against treating some groups carrying weapons differently from others. She said officers need reasonable suspicion to approach someone and question whether they can legally possess a firearm.

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