



News

Lawsuit against city for police abuse headed for payout

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A man claiming to have been physically abused by Minneapolis police officers is likely to receive \$25,000 after the City Council's Ways and Means Committee on Monday approved payment.

The full Council will vote on the settlement on Friday.

According to a police report of the 2004 incident, Bobby White was struck on the head and forced to the ground by Minneapolis Officer William Bjork after White allegedly refused to remove his hands from his pockets.

White's lawyer, Robert Bennett, said his client didn't deserve to be struck.

"He didn't do anything wrong. There was no good reason to stop him and no reason to use any force at all. Thus the force used, striking him against the head, which is against police training, is unconstitutionally excessive," Bennett said.

The incident occurred almost three years ago on September 26, 2004, around midnight, in the area of 25th Street and 15th Avenue South.

Officers Bjork and Lance Christenson noticed Bobby White and a companion talking loudly as they walked down the street. As White and his friend passed the officers, White supposedly stated "Yeah that's right the f-ing police," prompting Officers Bjork and Christenson to stop and investigate the situation.

Officer Bjork allegedly asked White to remove his hands from his pockets two times. White failed to do so and continued walking towards Bjork. Bjork then struck White in the face, took him to the ground, and handcuffed him. White's friend was taken to the ground and handcuffed as well.

When asked by officers why White was talking so loudly, White's companion stated that his friend was "just running his mouth" and had been having problems with women recently. The two men were later released. Before White's release, however, the officers observed that White had blood in his mouth. He was offered medical attention but refused.

White's version of the story, however, has a slightly different twist to it. White claims that he was struck in the face with a fist, not an open hand, and that he had willingly put his hands in the air and said, "What did I do?" when stopped by Officer Bjork. He also claims to have been kicked after being thrown on the ground by Bjork. White's companion supports White's version of the story and states that he too was subjected to unnecessary force.

White went to Hennepin County Medical Center later in the day and had X-rays taken. The X-rays revealed two loose teeth. He returned to another hospital later on and was diagnosed with a healing jaw fracture.

When asked whether he felt the incident with White was indicative of a larger problem of Police brutality within Minneapolis Police force, Bennett said that he believes it is.

"I think Minneapolis has been a troubled force in terms of excessive force for a long time. This case isn't big enough to say that it represents a trend. But this incident is indicative of the fact that there are a number of officers in the Minneapolis Police force that think they can do this to the Minneapolis community. And they usually pick the right people, so they usually can. But Mr. White managed to at least try to vindicate his rights and was at least partially successful in doing so."

Michelle Gross, founder and spokesperson for activist group Communities United Against Police Brutality said, "Once again the city is going to pay out taxpayer dollars to cover for the misconduct of police. It would be much cheaper for the community

and better for the community, if they would simply rein in the police in the first place.”

When asked about the case, City Attorney James Moore stated that he could not comment on pending litigation.



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