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## Florence Sheriff's Office Sued Over Fatal Shooting, Dog Attack During Pursuit

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– Categories: Crime



A South Carolina sheriff's deputy has been fired and criminally charged after fatally shooting an unarmed man and ordering a police dog to attack an elderly bystander during a chaotic incident in May. Two civil lawsuits have also been filed against the Florence County Sheriff's Office, accusing it of excessive force, negligence, and failure to supervise.

The lawsuits against Deputy Treyvon Sellers, filed in Florence County state court, follow the release of body camera footage that shows Sellers fatally shooting William Rankin and allowing his K9 partner to maul 70-year-old Johnny Cooper inside Cooper's mobile home.

The first complaint, filed July 16 by Rankin's brother, alleges Sellers shot Rankin as he lay on the floor with his hands raised in surrender. A second lawsuit, filed July 22 by Cooper, claims the sheriff's office deployed a known aggressive dog in a residential setting, resulting in serious injuries to an innocent bystander.

Sellers was arrested in August by the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) and charged with voluntary manslaughter, assault and battery of a high and aggravated nature, and misconduct in office. He was placed on administrative leave shortly after the May 26 incident and has since been terminated.

"This incident is not indicative of our values, our mission, or our training," said Sheriff T.J. Joye following the arrest. "I have expressed my deep regret and sorrow to the families of Mr. Rankin and Mr. Cooper."

The incident began when Sellers pursued Rankin, who was suspected of speeding, from the city of Florence into a rural area. Rankin abandoned his vehicle and fled into Cooper's home. Sellers entered with his Belgian Malinois, Ikar. Within moments, Rankin was shot and Cooper was attacked.

Attorneys for the Rankin family say the deadly force was unjustified. "This lawsuit is being brought in order to seek justice for William Rankin," said attorney Ashley Nance, who is joined by Neil Alger, Linwood Edwards, and Chaquez McCall in representing the family. "Not only for William Rankin himself, whose life was tragically cut short, but for the loved ones he leaves behind."

Johnny Cooper is represented by Kenneth Moss and George Spirakis of North Myrtle Beach, along with Robert E. Lee of Marion. "Cooper was an innocent bystander," said Lee. "They came looking for Rankin. He didn't go looking for them."

According to Lee, Rankin and Cooper shared a close relationship, with Rankin often helping Cooper with groceries and errands.

While South Carolina sees numerous officer-involved shootings annually, it is rare for law enforcement officers to face criminal charges. Sellers' case is being prosecuted by Heather Weiss of the South Carolina Attorney General's Office. Veteran Florence attorney and former federal prosecutor Rose Mary Parham is representing Sellers in the pending criminal proceedings in Florence County court.

The sheriff's office has not yet filed a legal response to either lawsuit.