

Did Trenton Police kill Joseph Ahr? Attorney demands justice



Defense attorney Robin Lord.

TRENTON — Cops used force on a 64-year-old grandfather with underlying medical conditions, and the subject died several weeks later in the intensive care unit, *The Trentonian* has learned.

Manhandled and subjected to chemical agent pepper spray during a July 6 arrest, Joseph Ahr perished Friday and family attorney Robin Lord is calling for justice.

“Charge the officers responsible, because they now caused his death,” Lord alleged in an interview Saturday night. “They should be suspended without pay and immediately charged with a criminal offense.”

Lord said the incident occurred July 6 at the Ahr residence on the 700 block of Monmouth Street in Trenton’s East Ward.

When Trenton cops arrived, “They pulled him out of his house, put him on the ground, assaulted and maced him,” Lord said in describing the use of force on the grandfather. “He was living and breathing fine in his home before the police got there.”

Lord says the officers were in the “wrong place” and “had no right to be there,” adding she has not seen any warrants.

Ahr had COPD, a chronic inflammatory lung disease that causes breathing difficulties, and other underlying medical issues, according to Lord, who said Ahr remained hospitalized in the ICU on a ventilator from July 6 until his death July 24.

Trenton Police spokesman Lt. Jason Kmiec confirmed the use of force and underlying conditions, saying: “He was sprayed with pepper spray, and he had preexisting lung conditions and COVID. Last I heard he was in ICU. I didn’t hear he died.”

City spokesman Michael Walker on Saturday confirmed the subject’s death and expressed condolences to the Ahr family.

“In the interest of transparency,” Walker said Saturday night, “all documents and information related to Mr. Ahr’s arrest on July 6 have been provided to New Jersey’s Attorney General for review.”

Walker added that it “is important to note that Mr. Ahr’s attack on a police officer was halted using non-lethal force. The City of Trenton extends its condolences to his family and friends during their time of grief and mourning.”

According to the state Attorney General’s Office, a use of force incident involves physical force, mechanical force, enhanced mechanical force, deadly force, or any combination of these actions.

Pepper spray is considered mechanical force, and mechanical force “involves the use of some device or substance, other than a firearm, to overcome a subject’s resistance to the exertion of the law enforcement officer’s authority,” according to the AG’s newly revised Use of Force Reporting Portal Guide.

“Use of force should never be considered routine,” the AG guide says. “In determining to use force, the law enforcement officer shall only use the degree of force objectively reasonable and necessary to compel compliance of an unwilling

subject. Law enforcement officers should exhaust all other reasonable means before resorting to use of force.”

Police may be held criminally accountable if they use unjustifiable force on a subject, such as what occurred to Black man George Floyd in Minneapolis two months ago. Four Minneapolis cops have been fired and charged with heavy crimes on allegations they killed Floyd in custody.

After Joseph Ahr’s death Friday, the state Attorney General’s Office assumed the investigation of this incident in accordance with state law, according to Steven Barnes, a spokesperson with the AG’s Office, who said the investigation is being conducted by the Integrity Bureau within the AG’s Office of Public Integrity and Accountability.

“Enacted in January 2019, P.L. 2019, c.1 is a law which requires that the Attorney General’s Office conduct investigations of a person’s death that occurs during an encounter with a law enforcement officer acting in the officer’s official capacity or while the decedent is in custody,” Barnes said Sunday evening via email. “Such investigations are conducted pursuant to the [10-step process](#) established by Attorney General Law Enforcement Directive 2019-4.”

The AG’s Office is investigating the April 3 [death of Stephen Dolceamore](#) at the hands of TPD in addition to the Ahr incident.

The Trentonian has filed Open Public Records Act requests seeking the use-of-force reports and police body-worn camera footage in the July 6 arrest of Ahr.

Ahr had a 9-year-old granddaughter and was “working and supporting his family” for years before his forceful encounter with Trenton Police, according to Lord, who said the grandfather was actively employed by Amtrak.

Staff writer Isaac Avilucea contributed to this report.