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**Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515**

CORRINE BROWN
3D DISTRICT, FLORIDA

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March 16, 2012

The Honorable Eric Holder
Attorney General of the United States
U.S. Department of Justice 950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20530

RE: Request for Investigation of the Shooting Death of Unarmed Black Teenager in Sanford, Florida

Dear Mr. Holder:

I am writing to respectfully request that the Department of Justice investigate the February 26 shooting death of an unarmed black teenager and the response from local authorities. I have attached some news articles that provide disturbing details about the incident and the police response.

As seventeen year old Trayvon Martin was walking through a gated community where he was visiting his father, he was shot by a neighborhood watch captain, George Zimmerman. Zimmerman, who was armed with a pistol, tracked Trayvon down the street and called police to report seeing a "suspicious person." The dispatcher advised him to cease following the teen because police were on the way. Minutes later, Trayvon was dead from a bullet to the chest. Zimmerman claims that an altercation occurred and he acted in self-defense. Trayvon was "armed" only with a bag of skittles and a can of ice tea.

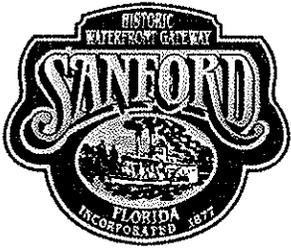
Local police accepted Zimmerman's story and did not arrest him. As a result, his concealed weapon permit has not been suspended. How police immediately concluded that he had a reasonable belief of imminent death or great bodily harm from a boy half his size remains unclear and three witnesses have publicly contradicted this version. Police have not released 911 tapes or witness statements so many questions remain unanswered.

Given the history of racial tension in the Sanford community, I believe it would be wise for the Department of Justice to become involved and I request an emergency meeting with you or a senior DOJ official on Tuesday, March 20th. As you can see in the attached letter, the Sanford mayor and the chief of police agree with this recommendation. I look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Corrine Brown
Member of Congress



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RANDY JONES
DISTRICT 3

PATTY MAHANY
DISTRICT 4

CITY MANAGER
NORTON N. BONAPARTE, JR.

March 16, 2012

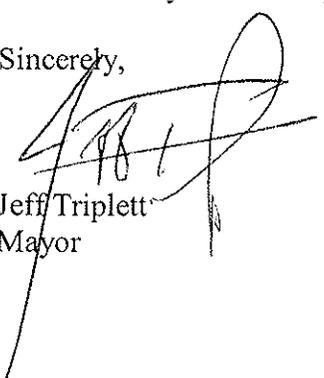
United States Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr.
Office of the Attorney General
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Honorable Attorney General Holder:

On behalf of the City of Sanford please accept this letter requesting an emergency meeting with you and Congresswoman Corrine Brown on Tuesday, March 20, 2012.

We wish to discuss our concerns regarding the investigation into the shooting death of seventeen year old Trayvon Martin in our city on February 26, 2012.

Sincerely,


Jeff Triplett
Mayor

orlandosentinel.com/news/local/sfl-trayvon-martin-family-20120315,0,4140372.story

OrlandoSentinel.com

Witnesses in Trayvon Martin death heard cries before shot

By Frances Robles

The Miami Herald

10:36 PM EDT, March 15, 2012

SANFORD

They heard the desperate wail of a child, a gunshot, and then silence.

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Trayvon Martin, 17, died Feb. 26 in a dark pathway some 20 minutes after a neighborhood watch volunteer called police saying he thought a young stranger looked suspicious. It was raining, and the volunteer thought the kid in the hoodie walked too slow and peeked in windows.

Three witnesses contacted by The Miami Herald say they saw or heard the moments before and after the Miami Gardens teenager's killing. All three said they heard the last howl for help from a despondent boy, and believe the sequence of sounds shatters the notion that Trayvon was killed in self defense.

As the controversy grows, so does the number of voices disputing the official version that watch captain George Zimmerman gave to police: that the 6-foot, 3-inch, 140-pound teen assaulted him when Zimmerman, 28, tried to question him. In fear for his life, he pulled Kel Tek .9mm handgun from his waistband and shot.

From Facebook to twitter and online petitions, local police and prosecutors are getting tens of thousands of demands for criminal charges as the national media shines a spotlight on a small, racially diverse town with a history of police tension. There are now more and more calls for the U.S. Department of Justice to intervene and try to answer: what really happened to Trayvon Martin?

“I heard someone crying – not boo-hoo crying, but scared or terrified or hurt maybe,”

said Mary Cutcher, 31. “To me, it was a child.”

Watch captain George Zimmerman said he tailed Trayvon in a mission to find out if the teen was up to no good. Zimmerman was out to put a stop to recent burglaries. He dialed police – his 46th call in the past 14 months to report shady people, reckless drivers and other disturbances around his neighborhood.

He offered to follow his suspect, but the dispatcher told him: “We don’t need you to do that.”

But Zimmerman did anyway. Some minutes later, Trayvon was killed with a gun the watch volunteer was licensed to carry.

“This was not self defense,” Cutcher said. “We heard no fighting, no wrestling, no punching. We heard a boy crying. As soon as the shot went off, it stopped, which tells me it was the child crying. If it had been Zimmerman crying, it wouldn’t have stopped. If you’re hurting, you’re hurting.”

She and her friend say they heard the sounds from a few steps away, where they were inside beside an open window. Seconds later, they dashed out to find a boy face down on the ground and a man standing over him, a foot on each side of the body on the ground, with his hands pinning the shooting victim down.

“I asked him, ‘What’s happening here? What’s going on?’ said Cutcher’s friend, who did not want her name published for fear for her safety. “The third time, I was indignant, and he said, ‘just call the police.’ Then I saw him with his hands over his head in the universal sign of: ‘Oh man, I messed up.’”

The women, who were the first on the scene, said they saw Zimmerman pacing back and forth.

“I know what I heard. I heard a cry and a shot,” the second witness said. “If there was a fight, it did not happen here where the boy was shot. I would have heard it, as this all happened right outside my open window.”

The women think there may well have been a physical altercation between the two, but it must have taken place in a different spot, where Zimmerman perhaps had a chance to compose himself and draw his weapon.

Cutcher was one of eight or nine 911 callers that night but she said investigators dismissed her, and a detective failed follow up with her. Both women said police seemed very blasé.

“Mr. Zimmerman’s claim is that the confrontation was initiated by Trayvon,” Police Chief Bill Lee said in an interview. “I am not going into specifics of what led to the violent physical encounter witnessed by residents. All the physical evidence and testimony we

have independent of what Mr. Zimmerman provides corroborates this claim to self defense.”

To claim self defense, someone has to show there was danger of great bodily harm or death, Lee said.

“Zimmerman had injuries consistent with his story,” Lee said.

Zimmerman had a damp shirt, grass stains, a bloody nose and was bleeding from a wound in back of his head, according to police reports.

“If someone asks you, ‘Hey do you live here?’ Is it OK for you to jump on them and beat the crap out of somebody?” Lee said. “It’s not.”

A neighborhood eighth grader out walking his dog said his family also called 911.

“I saw someone lying on the ground, and I heard screaming,” said Austin, 13, whose mother asked that his last name not be published. “I don’t know that it was the person on the [ground] who was screaming, but to me it sounded like a kid who was crying. It was a yell for help, and I think it was Trayvon.”

Austin wasn’t sure if the person was in a fight or had slipped and gotten hurt. Austin’s Boxer puppy got off the leash so the boy went chasing after the dog and lost sight of the scene for a moment. Then, he heard a gun go off.

He ran home and told his sister to call the police.

The boy, who is black, has been rattled ever since. He feels angry and disconcerted, and wonders whether he’s at risk too.

“That people can stereotype like that makes you scared,” he said.

Austin’s mom said he’s been acting out in school and seems mad all the time.

“My son has a terrible feeling of guilt, because he did not do anything to help. He’s angry,” said Austin’s mother, Cheryl Brown. “They are saying that Trayvon looked suspicious, because he was walking slow. So I guess I have to tell my son: make sure you always run fast.”

Chief Lee released a statement Thursday disputing Cutcher’s account, saying it differed from what she originally told police, which she angrily denies.

Cutcher originally gave police a statement that matched Zimmerman’s account, said police

spokesman Sgt. David Morgenstern.

Sanford's Police Chief Lee is "asking the public and the media to give the system the opportunity to work, in the interest of safety of the community," Morgenstern said.

Zimmerman, whose whereabouts are unknown, was not charged, and the case is now under review by the Brevard Seminole State Attorney's Office. Local and national black leaders have rallied around the incident as the latest example of a double standard of justice in what they consider a case of racial profiling.

On Thursday, Zimmerman's father hand-delivered a letter to the Orlando Sentinel, disputing widely repeated version of events, saying his Spanish-speaking son is not a racist.

"The media reports of the events are imaginary at best. At no time did George follow or confront Mr. Martin," Robert Zimmerman wrote. "When the true details of the event become public, and I hope that will be soon, everyone should be outraged by the treatment of George Zimmerman in the media."

A rally is planned for the Sanford City Council meeting March 26. Leaders are asking people to show up carrying Skittles, the candy Trayvon carried in his pocket when he died.

The witnesses say they are coming forward now, because they were shocked when no arrest was made.

"To me what happened here is that a grown man got whooped by a 17-year-old, and he was not afraid, but angry," said the woman who heard from inside her house.

"They are protecting Zimmerman for some reason," Trayvon's mother Sybrina Fulton said in Miami. "They are protecting him and we feel that Trayvon is the victim."

Lee said the matter needs to be taken to a grand jury as soon as possible.

"If the roles were reversed, our investigation would be exactly the same," he said. "Our investigation is color blind and based on the facts and circumstances, not color. I know I can say that until I am blue in the face, but as a white man in a uniform, I know it doesn't mean anything to anybody."

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orlandosentinel.com/news/local/os-trayvon-martin-shooting-parents-20120316,0,7579370.story

OrlandoSentinel.com

Trayvon Martin's father: Family 'betrayed' by Sanford police

Family's attorney says he may file complaint against Sanford police for witness intimidation, tampering and obstruction of justice.

By [Susan Jacobson](#), Orlando Sentinel

10:08 AM EDT, March 16, 2012

Tracy Martin, father of slain teenager Trayvon Martin, told reporters this morning that he feels his family has been "betrayed" by the police investigating his son's death.

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"It's a shame that he's not getting any justice," the elder Martin said. "We're not, as a family, getting any closure."

"I feel betrayed by the Sanford Police Department and there's no way that I can still trust them in investigating this crime."

After Martin spoke, the teen's mother, Sybrina Fulton, addressed reporters with tears in her eyes.

"I don't understand why this man has not been arrested," Fulton said.

Martin's family addressed the media in a news conference this morning. They were joined by their attorneys, as well as two witnesses who support the family's view that the killing wasn't self defense.

Benjamin Crump, and attorney for Travon's family, said this morning that he may file a complaint against Sanford police for witness intimidation, tampering and obstruction of justice.

"If the Sanford Police Department continues to engage in this unsavory fashion, we will assist with filing an official complaint with the Department of Justice for witness tampering, witness intimidation and obstruction of justice," Crump said.

Crump asserted that the police have taken shooter George Zimmerman's side in the investigation, only releasing information that would be beneficial to Zimmerman and attempting to discredit witnesses who have come forward in Trayvon's defense.

"The police job is to obtain all statements whether they like them or not," Crump said. "Police cannot interfere with an ongoing investigation, to deter future witnesses from coming forward."

The press conference comes a day after the police department said witness Mary Cutcher's statement during a TV interview was "inconsistent" with what she told investigators.

Attorney Benjamin Crump said the statement from police is another example of the department siding with shooter George Zimmerman.

Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer at the gated The Retreat at Twin Lakes, shot Trayvon dead while defending himself, he told Sanford police.

The Brevard-Seminole State Attorney's Office has asked the Florida Department of Law Enforcement to investigate.

Zimmerman has not been arrested, causing an outcry from the black community, activists and other citizens.

Meanwhile, a hearing in Sanford will be held at 10 a.m. Monday for the family's request to release 911 calls linked to the shooting. Police have not released those records, saying they are part of the ongoing investigation.

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orlandosentinel.com/news/blogs/beth-kassab/os-trayvon-martin-shooting-sanford-20120314,0,5402560.story

OrlandoSentinel.com

Trayvon Martin's death reminds Sanford of history of racial tension

By Martin E. Comas, Orlando Sentinel

11:05 PM EDT, March 14, 2012

In almost any community, the shooting death of a black teen by a white crime-watch volunteer would raise accusations of racism. But this one occurred in Sanford, a city that has struggled with racial tensions for a century. advertisement

Much of that tension stems from Sanford's long history as an agricultural community that attracted laborers, many of them black, to work in the fields, farms and railroads, historians say. They formed Seminole County's historic black communities of Georgetown, Goldsboro and Midway.

Founded by laborers in the late 19th century, Goldsboro was once an active center of black life and became the second town in Florida incorporated by blacks. But in 1911, Sanford stripped Goldsboro of its charter and took it over. The streets, named after its black pioneers, were quickly renamed.

"Ever since Goldsboro was taken over by Sanford, there has been tension," said Sanford Mayor Jeff Triplett.

The county seat of Seminole, Sanford has per capita income barely more than \$20,000 a year, and nearly a third of its 54,000 residents are black, according to 2010 U.S. census data.

"Because it's been an agricultural area for decades, it has had a higher percentage of poverty than the rest of the county," said Jim Robison, a board member of the Seminole County Historical Commission. "And there are concentration of areas that are going to have conflicts with the police and neighboring communities."

Many in Sanford say the seemingly slow pace by police to investigate last month's shooting death of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin is again raising suspicions that if shooter George Zimmerman were not white and the teen were not black, things would be different.

"I can tell you that if it was the other way around, someone would be in jail by now," Ulysees Cunningham said Wednesday. At 80 years old, the retired contractor, who is black, has lived in Sanford for most of his life, long enough to have seen its racist side, he said.

He remembers decades ago when black diners walked into restaurants and were seated apart from whites. Even now, he has watched police cars cruise through his neighborhood off Celery Avenue all night, "even though nothing was going on."

"By the police being slow-footed to arrest someone, it demonstrates that things are different for the black community," said Vibert White, a history professor at the University of Central Florida. "They have ignited a powder keg by being slow, by being indecisive and by being arrogant by not arresting this man."

Some are reminded of the 2010 incident when the white son of a Sanford police lieutenant was let go by police after sucker-punching a homeless black man outside a downtown bar.

Perry Echelberger, 64, who is white and has lived his entire life in Sanford, said it's understandable to suspect an element of racism when police have not released all the details of Trayvon's shooting.

"What's frustrating is that all the facts haven't been presented," he said while walking down First Avenue in downtown Sanford. "Something occurred that night that caused that man [Zimmerman] to be on edge, to feel threatened. What was that threat? What does the 911 tape say?"

Triplett said he understands the frustration by residents.

"I think that when a young man is killed, more than a week and a half [for police to respond] is an enormous amount of time," the Sanford mayor said. "But it's part of the process that all the evidence, that everything, has to be gathered.

"But if it was one of my sons, I would be wondering what was going on."

The Rev. James Watkins of Historic St. James AME Church in Georgetown said Sanford overall is "basically a peaceful community."

"But because people are viewing this as a racially motivated crime, it has the community aggravated," Watkins said. "If they [police] come out and release more details, if they release the 911 tape, it would calm things down."

Zimmerman's Neighborhood Watch group was started in September after residents reported at least three burglaries in the previous weeks, according to police.

Crime-watch volunteers are instructed to call police when they see anything suspicious, said Wendy Dorival, volunteer-program coordinator for Sanford Police.

"We actually tell them not to confront someone suspicious," she said. "Call us. Our officers are the ones who are paid and trained to go out and deal with it."

Even so, it has been more than two weeks since the teen's death, and suspicions linger. The Rev. Randolph Bracy Jr., a former president of the Orange County branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, said there are still too many questions about the shooting.

"There are so many things, so many questions, that on the face of it, it looks like an unfair justice," Bracy said. "And Sanford has a history of unfair justice."

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orlandosentinel.com/news/local/seminole/os-trayvon-martin-witness-tv-report-20120315,0,559932.story

OrlandoSentinel.com

Trayvon Martin: Woman gave 'inconsistent' statement on TV, Sanford PD says

By [Jeff Weiner](#), Orlando Sentinel

3:51 PM EDT, March 15, 2012

As national controversy swirls around the shooting of an unarmed teenager in advertisement Sanford, the city's police responded Thursday to a recent report which raised questions about their investigation.

Mary Cutcher, a witnesses to the shooting, told WFTV-Channel 9 in a Wednesday report that police took only a short statement from her, despite repeated attempts to share what she saw at length.

"I said, 'I know this was not self-defense. There was no punching, no hitting going on at the time, no wrestling,'" Cutcher said, adding that she felt the police investigating the shooting "blew us off."

The shooting of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed 17-year-old from Miami in town to visit family in the Retreat at Twin Lakes gated community, has prompted national outcry and claims of racism.

The man who shot Martin, George Zimmerman, claimed he acted in self-defense and has not been arrested or charged. Sanford police say they don't have enough evidence to make an arrest.

Police spokesman Sgt. Dave Morgenstern on Thursday issued a statement disputing Cutcher's version of events, calling her statements to WFTV "inconsistent with her sworn testimony to police."

"Actually officers who were canvassing the neighborhood looking for potential witnesses, the evening of the shooting, contacted her and she said she did not want to get involved,"

Morgenstern said.

Cutcher also appeared on CNN after her interview with the Orlando station.

"She did write a statement, for her roommate, and that was only after several attempts by officers who were asking for her information," Morgenstern said, adding that "the information she provided in her sworn statements... [was] consistent with the information Zimmerman provided."

Police on Tuesday said their investigation was complete and turned the case over to the State Attorney's Office. Prosecutors must now decide whether to charge 28-year-old Zimmerman with a crime.

WFTV news director Bob Jordan said of the police statement: "They will do their job and we will do ours."

"The Sanford Police Department and the State Attorney's Office each has a job to do, which is separate and distinct from what WFTV does," Jordan said.

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Orlando Watch Shooting Probe Reveals Questionable Police Conduct

By *MATT GUTMAN* and *SENI TIENABESO*
ORLANDO, Fla., March 13, 2012—

go.com

ABC News has uncovered questionable police conduct in the investigation of the fatal shooting of an unarmed black teenager by a white neighborhood watch captain in Florida, including the alleged "correction" of at least one eyewitness' account.

Sanford Police Chief Billy Lee said there is no evidence to dispute self-appointed neighborhood watch captain George Zimmerman's assertion that he shot 17-year-old Trayvon Martin out of self-defense.

"Until we can establish probable cause to dispute that, we don't have the grounds to arrest him," Lee said.

Martin had been staying at his father's girlfriend's house during the night of the NBA All-Star game Feb. 26.

The teenager went out to get some Skittles and a can of ice tea. On his way back into the gated suburban Orlando community, Martin, wearing a hood, was spotted by Zimmerman, 28.

According to law enforcement sources who heard Zimmerman's call to a non-emergency police number, he told a dispatcher "these a..holes always get away."

Zimmerman described Martin as suspicious because he was wearing a hooded sweatshirt and walking slowly in the rain, police later told residents at a town hall.

A dispatcher told him to wait for a police cruiser, and not leave his vehicle.

But about a minute later, Zimmerman left his car wearing a red sweatshirt and pursued Martin on foot between two rows of townhouses, about 70 yards from where the teen was going.

Lee said Zimmerman's pursuit of Martin did not of itself constitute a crime.

Witnesses told ABC News a fist fight broke out and at one point Zimmerman, who outweighed Martin by more than 100 pounds, was on the ground and that Martin was on top.

Austin Brown, 13, was walking his dog during the time of the altercation and saw both men on the ground but separated.

Brown along with several other residents heard someone cry for help, just before hearing a gunshot. Police arrived 60 seconds later and the teen was quickly pronounced dead.

According to the police report, Zimmerman, who was armed with a handgun, was found bleeding from the nose and the back of the head, standing over Martin, who was unresponsive after being shot.

An officer at the scene overheard Zimmerman saying, "I was yelling for someone to help me but no one would help me," the report said.

Witnesses told ABC News they heard Zimmerman pronounce aloud to the breathless residents watching the violence unfold "it was self-defense," and place the gun on the ground.

But after the shooting, a source inside the police department told ABC News that a narcotics detective and not a homicide detective first approached Zimmerman. The detective peppered Zimmerman with questions, the source said, rather than allow Zimmerman to tell his story. Questions can lead a witness, the source said.

Another officer corrected a witness after she told him that she heard the teen cry for help.

The officer told the witness, a long-time teacher, it was Zimmerman who cried for help, said the witness. ABC News has spoken to the teacher and she confirmed that the officer corrected her when she said she heard the teenager shout for help.

The Sanford Police Department refused to release 911 calls by witnesses and neighbors.

Several of the calls, ABC News has learned, contain the sound of the single gunshot.

Lee publically admitted that officers accepted Zimmerman's word at the scene that he had no police record.

Two days later during a meeting with Trayvon's father Tracy Martin, an officer told the father that Zimmerman's record was "squeaky clean."

Yet public records showed that Zimmerman was charged with battery against an officer and resisting arrest in 2005, a charge which was later expunged.

Zimmerman has not responded to requests for a comment.

"I asked [the police] well did you check out my son's record?" Tracy Martin told ABC News in an interview Sunday. "What about his?...Trayvon was innocent."

Trayvon Martin's Family Seeks Justice

Trayvon Martin had no arrest record or disciplinary action for violence as a student in North Miami's Krop High School.

On Monday Lee, seeking to head off racial unrest, tried to reassure the public that his department was doing all it could to reach a fair conclusion, as some in the crowd heckled him saying "a little black boy is dead."

Lee's department said it plans on passing its investigation over to the state's attorney office to determine whether or not to press charges against Zimmerman.

Trayvon Martin's parents described him as the kind of son who even at 17, allowed his parents to kiss him publicly.

"That was my baby, my youngest son," mother Sybrina Fulton told ABC News in an interview in Miami. "He meant a lot to me, I don't think the police department really understands that...I need justice for my family, I just want justice for my son."

Fulton is incensed that Zimmerman left his car despite being urged against it by dispatchers to stay put.

"My son didn't do anything he was walking home from the store. Why would the neighborhood watch guy would have a weapon?...It's just crazy. You are supposed to watch the neighborhood, not take the law into your own hands."

ABC News' Matthew Rosenbaum contributed to this report.