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LDF Calls for Justice and Change Following Police Killing of Sonya Massey

Yesterday, Sangamon County released details of four 911 calls made by Sonya Massey, a 36-year-old Black woman, in the 48 hours prior to her fatal shooting by Sean Grayson, who was then a Deputy Sheriff with the Sangamon County Sheriff's Office. Last week, body-worn camera footage was released, showing what transpired when Grayson, who is white, shot Ms. Massey on July 6th in Springfield, Illinois. Ms. Massey's mental health and engagement with mobile crisis services was documented in call logs during the 48 hours prior to her shooting death.

Grayson was terminated by the Sangamon County Sheriff's Office and has been charged with three counts of first-degree murder, aggravated battery with a firearm, and official misconduct.

Jin Hee Lee, Director of Strategic Initiatives at the [Legal Defense Fund](#) (LDF), issued the following statement about the shooting:

“Our hearts break for the friends and family of Sonya Massey, whose tragic and shockingly violent death should weigh heavily on this nation. This senseless police killing is a chilling reflection of the failures of our current public safety system—one where a mother of two was killed in her own home by police who were supposed to protect her after they responded to her 911 call for help. Ms. Massey complied with former Deputy Sheriff Grayson's instruction to check on a pot of boiling water by turning off the stove and removing the pot. Nevertheless, Grayson verbally threatened Ms. Massey, causing her to apologize and crouch in fear. Grayson then inexplicably shot Ms. Massey three times and discouraged his partner from administering aid as she lay gasping for air on the floor in a horrific display of cruelty.

“On the day before Ms. Massey's death, her mother called 911 because Ms. Massey was experiencing a mental health crisis. During that 911 call, Ms. Massey's mother implored the dispatcher not to send “combative policemen that are prejudiced” and to not hurt her daughter. The mother also expressed personal fear of the police. Sixteen hours later, Ms. Massey would be killed by former Deputy Sheriff Grayson.

“We extend our deepest condolences to Ms. Massey’s loved ones and, along with local stakeholders, call for swift and thorough justice. No human being should experience the callous and unconscionable violence wrought upon Ms. Massey. The state police investigation, which found Grayson’s force to be unjustified, and the resulting criminal charges were both appropriate and timely, but we cannot accept these developments as a final resolution. There continues to be an urgent need to transform our public safety system to prevent fatal violence of this kind from ever happening again. Black people, like Ms. Massey, must be able to call for help without fear of losing their lives.

“Two children lost their mother, and an entire community has been deeply and irrevocably harmed as a result of yet another senseless act of police violence. We cannot wait for more families to lose their loved ones before taking swift and bold action. We must implement a [new framework for public safety](#) to ensure our communities are truly safe—one that provides services for people experiencing mental health emergencies without harrowing violence like Ms. Massey’s tragic death. If we do not act now, more lives will be at risk.”

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