



Ohio Attorney General's Office
Bureau of Criminal Investigation
Investigative Report



2022-1356

Officer Involved Critical Incident - 1659 S. Main Street, Akron, Ohio
44301

Investigative Activity: Interview with Deputy Chief Jesse Leeson

Activity Date: October 24, 2022

Authoring Agent: Special Agent Cory Momchilov #64

Narrative:

On October 24, 2022, Special Agent (SA) Cory Momchilov (Momchilov) received a call from Detective Sergeant Tony Starvaggi (Starvaggi) of the Akron Police Department. Sergeant Starvaggi advised SA Momchilov that Dupri Whatley (Whatley) had applied for a police officer position with the Akron Police Department. As part of the process, Whatley was interviewed by several Akron Police Department administrators and during that interview, Whatley discussed Jayland Walker. Sergeant Starvaggi advised SA Momchilov that he may want to speak with Deputy Chief Jesse Leeson (Leeson) to obtain further detail. Sergeant Starvaggi later forwarded SA Momchilov Deputy Chief Leeson's contact information. SA Momchilov made contact with Deputy Chief Leeson, and it was decided that SA Momchilov and Deputy Chief Leeson would meet in person.

On October 24, 2022, SA Momchilov traveled to the Akron Police Department and spoke with Deputy Chief Leeson. SA Momchilov advised Deputy Chief Leeson that it was his understanding that he had interviewed Dupri Whatley as part of the pre-employment process. Deputy Chief Leeson stated that was correct. Deputy Chief Leeson explained that Whatley had filled out an application, passed the written test, passed the physical test and background investigation. Deputy Chief Leeson further explained that he was part of the conditional job offer interview that was conducted on Whatley.

SA Momchilov stated that it was his understanding that Jayland Walker's (Walker) name was brought up during the interview. Deputy Chief Leeson replied, "Yes." SA Momchilov asked Deputy Chief Leeson if he could discuss the content of that interview.

Deputy Chief Leeson advised that it was purported that Whatley was best friends with Walker. Deputy Chief Leeson explained that if Whatley did gain employment with the Akron Police Department, it is possible that he would be working with the officers who were involved in the shooting. Deputy Chief Leeson advised that Whatley was asked how he would respond to working with the officers who were involved in the shooting.

SA Momchilov asked Deputy Chief Leeson what Whatley's response was. Deputy Chief Leeson stated, "He gave a very mature response, I was glad to get. He eluded to something to the fact that he understands use-of-force and those officers did what they needed to do to survive and he also mentioned that he had had conversations with Jayland when he was in his academy and

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there was something about questions, Jayland had asked him questions about suicide by cop. And so, he kind of wrapped it up or summarized it by saying he understood that they did what they had to do and he understood it and he might of said something that he might of done the same thing in their shoes. He might of said something like that as well.”

SA Momchilov asked Deputy Chief Leeser if Whatley elaborated on what he told Walker when Walker asked information regarding suicide by cop. Deputy Chief Leeser replied, “No, I didn’t ask for anything as far as those. I just wanted to make sure that he would be able to work with those that were involved in a critical incident with a good friend of his.”

The interview with Deputy Chief Leeser was audio recorded. That recording is attached to this Investigative Report.

Attachments:

The audio recording of the interview is attached to this Investigative Report.

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