

## Chicago attorneys get \$1.85M for family of man killed in Portage police shooting

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A pair of Chicago attorneys secured a \$1.85 million settlement for the family of an unarmed Black man shot by police during a 2017 traffic stop.

Settlement funds were distributed April 13, according to plaintiff's attorneys. The agreement was reached in January following mediation with retired judge Richard McDevitt of McDevitt Mediation Center.

Portage police Officer Grant Crizer pulled over William Spates, 39, on April 22, 2017.

Spates pulled into a residential driveway and Crizer used his squad car to block Spates from leaving the driveway.

According to court records, Spates would not give Crizer his driver's license. Crizer tried to pull Spates out of his car and then tasered him. Court records stated that Spates' car rolled back and hit the police car parked behind him, though it is unclear if the movement was intentional.

"The car backed up after Spates was tasered," said Michael D. Robbins, of Michael D. Robbins & Associates, one of the Spates' family attorneys. "In his deposition, Officer Crizer confirmed that and admitted that it could have happened as a result."

Crizer then moved in front of Spates' car and fired eight shots, hitting Spates in his right arm, right back and right side of his head. Spates died at the scene, according to court records.

Spates' family sued the officer in Indiana federal court for excessive use of force under the Fourth and 14th Amendments. The shooting was deemed "justified" by the Portage County State's Attorney, according to court records.

Crizer admitted no liability or wrongdoing in the shooting.

"Cases settle for all kinds of reasons," said Crizer's attorney, Elizabeth A. Knight of Knight Hoppe Kurnik & Knight of the firm's Merrillville, Ind. office. "Officer Crizer does not admit any liability or that the shooting was wrong."

Knight also maintained Crizer's assertion that "the plaintiff was trying to run him over at the time of the incident."

Robbins and Jeffrey J. Neslund, of the Law Offices of Jeffrey J. Neslund, deny that claim.

"The car rolled backwards," Robbins said. "There is no doubt Spate's car made contact with the squad car behind it. When the other officers arrived, they said they found the car in neutral. From our perspective, the shooting was completely unnecessary. He had space to run. He did not have to shoot Mr. Spates."

Neslund said their client was pleased to have the case resolved without having to "relive it all again in court."

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, no trial date had been set at the time of the settlement.

The settlement was paid by Governmental Interinsurance Exchange, which represents the city of Portage, where Crizer still works as an officer.

Crizer was also represented by Joseph W. Smith and Byron D. Knight of Knight, Hoppe Kurnik & Knight.

This case is *Estate of William D. Spates v. Portage Police Officer Grant Crizer*, No. 18 CV 0001.