

IN SOLIDARITY



Name: Michelle Cusseaux

Dates: 50 years old on August 14, 2014

Place of death: Phoenix, AZ

Ms. Cusseaux suffered with depression, bi-polar disorder, and schizophrenia. A caring person, Michelle had gone back to school to become a peer-helper. On the day of Michelle's death, her mother, Frances Garrett, was in California, attending a suitability hearing for a man who had been convicted of the drive-by shooting of a family member in 1984. Both Ms. Garrett and Ms. Cusseaux had forgiven the individual and had accepted his apology.

A week or so prior to the fatal encounter, Ms. Cusseaux had registered a grievance with the Mental Health Center about an incident when transportation had not come through for her. Her mother had been in contact with the center, trying to get inpatient status for Michelle who needed to get back on her medications. Staff at the center called the Phoenix police department for a "wellness check". An "emergency mental health pick up order" was issued at 3:00 pm, Sgt. Percy Dupra approached the door of Ms. Cusseaux residence.

At first, Michelle, curtly informed the officer that she was fine and told him to go away. Reportedly, Officer Dupra then entered the residence. Some say Michelle was fixing a door and that was the reason she had a claw hammer in hand. Police reports note that the victim, wielding the hammer as a weapon, approached Sgt. Dupra. The officer fired shot into her heart. A neighbor called Frances Garrett who then heard some of the aftermath of the shooting. On August 22, an empty coffin, symbolizing Michelle Cusseaux's death, was wheeled through the streets of Phoenix to City Hall. Coming on the heels of the Michael Brown shooting, demonstrators were keen to change the system.

The City of Phoenix Police Department, after a review by a Use of Force Board, determined that Officer Dupra had not acted within policy; he was demoted so as never to be a supervisor, nor be on patrol again after a 19 year career. The City also reviewed their policies regarding interaction with a person in mental health crisis. It is believed that Michelle Cusseaux's family received \$1.5 million in compensation from the City of Phoenix.

June 17, 2020