

Murray pays out \$152,000 to settle racial bias suit

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Murray City has settled a civil lawsuit for \$152,000 filed against the city and a police officer alleging racial profiling. The suit revolves around a 2018 traffic stop in which Donna Miller, a Black woman, was pulled over by Murray City police officer Jarom Allred, who thought she was driving under the influence. According to a Murray City press release, “Ms. Miller’s car was seen stopped perpendicular on State Street (near Fashion Place Mall) straddling two lanes of travel. Ms. Miller turned north on State Street. The officer initiated a traffic stop after he observed Ms. Miller drifted at least four times outside her lane of travel. Ms. Miller agreed to perform three standardized field sobriety tests, and during the first two tests showed several clues of possible impairment. She refused to take the final test. After her arrest, a blood sample was taken and sent to the state toxicology laboratory. Several weeks later, the test results returned negative for alcohol and illegal drugs.”

Miller’s attorneys from the ACLU responded that, “...the officer lacked probable cause to stop her, let alone arrest her, after she passed four field sobriety tests, including two breathalyzer exams which showed ‘.00’ alcohol level in her system. Detained for three hours at the police station, she passed a battery of 10 additional tests, including a blood test checking for eight illegal substances, which likewise came back negative. Despite these results and no other evidence, the arresting officer said she was a regular marijuana user to justify the DUI arrest. At the time of her traumatic arrest, Ms. Miller, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who does not consume alcohol or illicit drugs, was driving to the LDS Business College where she was a nursing student.”

A case summary released by the ACLU alleges Allred, a white policeman, initially stopped Miller on the pretext that she had no car insurance on file, though she did produce proof of insurance when asked. Miller’s suit contends that Allred then proceeded to charge Miller with a DUI, impounded her car, and had her license suspended. Miller, who is also diabetic, had her license reinstated and was refunded any fines. Miller believed the treatment stemmed from the fact that she is Black.

“No one should have to experience the humiliation and degradation that I did simply because I was ‘driving while Black,’” Miller’s press release said. “I want my example to show Murray and other cities and police departments across Utah that racism is real and convince them to train their police officers to see and stop racial bias while doing their jobs.”

Complete video footage of the incident was not available. According to the city, the police officer was starting his shift and was not wearing his body camera. The police car’s dash camera footage was also incomplete, as it did not record the officer’s initial observations.

“The City believes the entire encounter was lawful,” Murray’s press release said. “However, the City acknowledges that in today’s age of body cameras, not having a body camera on, even when for valid reasons, creates a question in the minds of the public. Ms. Miller accepted the City’s offer to settle for \$152,000 to avoid the expense, burden, and uncertainty associated with litigation, and to resolve the litigation completely. The City stands by the officer and affirms its belief that the officer did not violate policy. Again, the settlement does not constitute an admission of liability or fault by the City or its officer. No new policies or training will be necessary or part of the agreement.”

In July 2020, the city passed a joint resolution committing its public safety officers to equal justice, police accountability and racial justice. Mayor Blair Camp also created a Public Safety Advisory Board, an independent committee, tasked with reviewing concerns in Murray’s police and fire department.