

Family of Andre Hill reaches \$10M settlement with Columbus

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Ohio’s capital city will pay a \$10 million settlement for the family of Andre Hill, a Black man who was fatally shot by a white Columbus police officer in December as he emerged from a garage holding a cellphone, the Columbus city attorney announced Friday.

It’s the largest such settlement in city history.

Hill, 47, was fatally shot by officer Adam Coy on Dec. 22 as Hill emerged from a garage holding up a cellphone. Coy was fired and has pleaded not guilty to murder and reckless homicide charges.

“No amount of money will ever bring Andre Hill back to his family, but we believe this is an important and necessary step in the right direction,” Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein said in a statement.

As part of the settlement, a gym frequented by Hill will be renamed the Andre Hill Gymnasium.

At a news conference Friday afternoon surrounded by Hill’s family, attorney Ben Crump said, “We come here to applaud the city leadership in saying Andre Hill’s life matters, and to send a message that we’re better than this America.”

Hill’s daughter, Carissa Hill, held her 3-year-old daughter as she called it a “a very big day for me and my family.”

“We’re just sad we can’t share that with our dad being here,” she said. As she once did, her daughter will visit the gym her father loved.

“The difference is, when I went, I was going with my dad,” Hill said. “When she goes to the gym, it will just be for my dad, in my dad’s name.”

Andre Hill’s older sister, Shawna Barnett, said that, “the money is a good thing; but having Andre here would be better,”

Barnett said.

Hill was visiting a family friend when he was shot. Coy and another officer had responded to a neighbor’s nonemergency complaint about someone stopping and starting a car outside.

“He was bringing me Christmas money. He didn’t do anything,” a woman inside the house shouted at police afterward.

The shooting was recorded by Coy’s body camera, but without sound because Coy hadn’t activated the camera on what started as a nonemergency call.

A 60-second look-back function on the camera captured the shooting.

Coy, who had a long history of complaints from citizens, was fired Dec. 28 for failing to activate his body camera and for not providing medical aid to Hill. He was initially charged for dereliction of duty for not activating the camera, but those charges were dropped.

Coy’s attorneys successfully argued the officer didn’t violate any duty because he was on a non-emergency run that didn’t require the cameras to be activated.

Beyond an internal police investigation, the Ohio attorney general, the U.S. attorney for central Ohio and the FBI have begun their own probes into the shooting.

Following Hill’s death, Mayor Andrew Ginther forced out Police Chief Thomas Quinlan in January, saying he’d lost confidence in the chief’s ability to make needed changes to the department.

The city is narrowing a list of finalists for the new chief, with an announcement expected by month’s end. All candidates are external, with Ginther saying an outsider was needed to enact broad cultural changes in the department.

The department is under

scrutiny for recent fatal shootings of Black people by white officers, including the death of 16-year-old Ma’Khia Bryant on April 20. And earlier this month, a federal judge ordered the city to alter the way it responds to mass protests, saying officers ran “amok” during protests over racial injustice and police brutality last summer.

Ginther and other officials invited the Justice Department last month to review the agency for deficiencies and racial disparities in several areas.

Chenelle Jones, a Franklin University dean and chair of its public safety program and a member of the new Columbus Civilian Police Review Board, said “no amount of money is going to bring Andre Hill back.”

“It’s not going to solve the bigger issue of the need for transformation within the Columbus Division of Police,” she said.

The settlement announcement follows other large payouts in recent months by cities over the killing of Black people by white officers.

In March, the city of Minneapolis reached a \$27 million settlement with the family of George Floyd ahead of the trial of Derek Chauvin, the white former officer charged in Floyd’s death. Chauvin was convicted in April of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter for pressing his knee against Floyd’s neck for about 9 1/2 minutes as Floyd said he couldn’t breathe and went motionless.

In September, the city of Louisville, Kentucky, agreed to pay Breonna Taylor’s family \$12 million and reform police practices. Taylor was shot to death by officers acting on a no-knock warrant.



Union County Auditor honored
 The Union County Auditor’s Office was recently awarded the Government Finance Officers’ Association’s Achievement of Excellence of Financial Reporting as well as the Auditor of State’s Award with Distinction. The awards recognize that Auditor Andrea Weaver had a clean financial audit and that her reporting was excellent. This is the third time Weaver has received the Auditor of State’s Award. Weaver said she has received the GFOA award, “many times.” Weaver said her amazing team and the excellent fiscal officers in the county departments and agencies make these awards possible. Above, Weaver, left, poses with Ohio Auditor Keith Faber.

(Photo submitted)

JTFD

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from her superiors while teaching those she supervises.

Especially with the upcoming construction of a second fire station, Stewart said he trusts putting this additional responsibility “on her shoulders.”

“She has character... and she is a character,” he said with a laugh.

Lt. Justin French agreed. He said he first met Zimmer while they were helping a family on a “tragic occasion.” French said he

was deeply impressed by her dedication to the family and her ability to be “so calm under pressure.”

“She was phenomenal,” he said.

Zimmer said she is thankful to be surrounded by male firefighters, like Stewart and French, who support and empower her.

She said they have helped her overcome the “intimidation factor” that can come with breaking into a male-dominated field.

Now, Zimmer said she “fits in with one of the guys” and they share many

of the same interests.

“I have to give the guys credit,” Zimmer said. “They always push me.”

“She’s a person that makes that easy,” French responded.

He said Zimmer’s promotion is a “natural progression” that reflects the increasing diversity in the township.

Zimmer said she hopes she’s at the start of a trend that will only continue.

“If you have passion, you can prove to anybody that you can do anything,” she said.

Oklahoma bucks red-state trend by extending early voting period

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — On Election Day last year, state Rep. Jon Echols was mortified to see a 3 1/2-hour line to vote in his district, which stretches from the edge of Oklahoma City’s urban core into suburban neighborhoods that give way to wide stretches of rural land.

A nation like the U.S. — with “real, free and fair elections,” Echols said — shouldn’t make people wait so long to participate in democracy.

“We should all be humiliated that we had that,” Echols said.

He may sound like a voting rights advocate or a Democratic politician set on expanding access to the ballot, but Echols is a Republican and the majority floor leader of the GOP-controlled Oklahoma House.

What he did after that Election Day revelation stands in sharp contrast to what the GOP has done in many other states — Echols helped make it slightly easier to vote in deep-red Okla-

homa.

Gov. Kevin Stitt, a Republican, signed legislation this week that adds a day to in-person early voting in the state and an extra hour to Saturday early voting, and it also makes changes to ensure mail-in ballots are received in time to be counted. The move comes as voting has become a top issue among Republicans — but in the other direction.

GOP-controlled states from Arkansas to Florida have passed laws making it harder to vote, ranging from adding scrutiny to signatures on mail ballots to limiting the time frame drop boxes can be used, and all inspired by former President Donald Trump’s false insistence that he lost his reelection bid because of fraud.

In Oklahoma, where Republicans feel little threat from Democrats, the party is acknowledging that easing access to the ballot may increase turnout.

While restrictions in Georgia led Major League

Baseball to move the All-Star Game, and Texas’ proposed legislation has sparked protests in the streets and from major corporations like American Airlines, Oklahoma’s modest changes drew little controversy. They came in a state worried about its perennially low turnout rate — only 55% of the eligible population voted in last year’s presidential election, the lowest in the country, according to ElectProject.org, which tracks turnout since the country’s founding. Nationally, more than two-thirds of voters cast ballots.

Oklahoma’s entire delegation in the U.S. House — all Republicans — heeded Trump’s call about fake election fraud and voted against certifying the Electoral College votes on Jan. 6, and two dozen Republican state lawmakers urged them in a letter to do so. But the bill to expand early voting sailed through the House and Senate with just a handful of opposing votes.

Chad Alexander, a GOP

strategist and former chair of the Oklahoma Republican Party, said he thinks part of the reason the measure faced little opposition is that one extra day of early voting isn’t likely to slow the Republican dominance in the deep-red state.

“We haven’t had a Democrat carry a single county in a presidential race in five election cycles,” Alexander said. “Every statewide elected official is a Republican, and they were elected in an off-year for Republicans.”

“Oklahoma is very red, and I don’t think this change disproportionately affects either party,” he said.

That contrasts with other states where Republicans have pushed to change voter laws: political battlegrounds like Florida; states where the GOP fears its hold is slipping, like Arizona and Georgia; or even places where the party is on the upswing but still threatened by occasional wins on the other side of the aisle, like Montana. In several of these states, the changes dispro-

portionately hamper Democratic voters, like college students in Montana, who can no longer use campus IDs as valid voting identification.

Oklahoma has long stood out as a place with restrictive voting laws.

Even with an extra day for Oklahomans to cast in-person, absentee ballots, Oklahoma’s 4 1/2 days of early voting are among the fewest in the nation. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, early voting periods across the country range from four days to 45 days, with the average length being 19 days.

Oklahoma Election Board Secretary Paul Zirix said the additional day will provide a convenience to voters, but he’s skeptical that it will have a dramatic effect on turnout in Oklahoma.

“Generally, I think if you look around the country at states with higher turnout, I personally think it has a lot less to do with things like the number of early voting days that states have avail-

able and has a lot more to do with the amount of money political parties and candidates are spending on get-out-the-vote programs,” Zirix said.

Pat McFerron, a Republican pollster and strategist, said adding an early day of voting will likely also fend off criticism about Oklahoma’s laws, which include a voter ID requirement and notarized mail-in ballots.

“I would actually say the Republican partisans I’ve spoken to are not enamored with this move,” McFerron said, “especially when you consider that generally our locations that are open early tend to really benefit Democratic candidates.”

“Honestly, I don’t think this is a blatantly pro-Republican type of move at all,” he added.

House Minority Leader Rep. Emily Virgin, a Democrat from the college town of Norman, said that while she’s pleased the number of voting days is increasing, far more needs to be done to make voting more accessible for Oklahomans.

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U.S. calls reports of migrant children in buses ‘unacceptable’

By The Associated Press

Reports of unaccompanied migrant children being forced to stay overnight in parked buses at the Dallas convention center are “completely unacceptable” if true, U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra said Friday.

Dr. Amy Cohen, a psychiatrist and executive director of the advocacy group Every Last One, said a 15-year-old Honduran boy she is working with was held on a bus from Saturday to Wednesday, using the bus bathroom during that time and unable to move about freely or communicate with family. The boy encountered at least three other children who were held as long in the parking lot of

the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center, said Cohen, who also has been in contact with another child who was confined earlier to a bus for an extended period.

It is unclear how many children were kept on buses overnight.

“This is completely unacceptable,” Becerra said. “We’re quickly investigating this to get to the bottom of what happened, and we’ll work to make sure this never happens again. The safety and well-being of the children is our priority.”

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said “there’s no excuse for this kind of treatment.”

The reports are “outrageous, they’re unacceptable

and they do not meet our standard for child care,” Psaki said.

The Honduran boy’s experience, first reported by NBC News, comes as Health and Human Services massively expands its capacity to house migrant children until they can be placed with a sponsor in the United States, usually parents or close relatives, while their cases wind through immigration court. It comes in response to the largest influx of unaccompanied children on record.

The department, whose lodging is more suited to longer-term stays than Border Patrol holding facilities, has grown its capacity to about 20,000 beds from less than 1,000 in mid-February.

LOTTERY

CLEVELAND (AP) — These Ohio lotteries were drawn Friday:

Mega Millions
 Estimated jackpot: \$430 million

Pick 3 Evening
 2-8-6
 Pick 3 Midday
 2-5-0
 Pick 4 Evening
 9-7-9-3
 Pick 4 Midday
 9-9-6-3
 Pick 5 Evening
 0-0-0-3-7
 Pick 5 Midday
 9-4-1-5-8
 Powerball
 Estimated jackpot: \$183 million

Rolling Cash 5
 05-09-13-20-39
 Estimated jackpot: \$110,000