

Grand jury to review police shooting of Georgia minister

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ATLANTA (ABP) — A north Georgia prosecutor says he will let a grand jury decide whether to bring criminal charges against undercover police officers involved in the fatal shooting of a Baptist minister during a botched drug sting.

The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* [reported](#) Dec. 1 that Brian Rickman, district attorney for three counties in northeast Georgia, said in an interview he was turning over a Georgia Bureau of Investigation's report of the Sept. 1 shooting death of Jonathan Ayers, to a Mountain Judicial Circuit grand jury. Ayers was pastor of Shoal Creek Baptist Church in Lavonia, Ga.,

The *Independent-Mail* in Anderson, S.C., [quoted](#) unnamed court officials saying the grand jury will hear the case Dec. 15 as part of its regular session. The grand jury is expected to be in session at least three days to consider the report and other possible indictments unrelated to the shooting incident.

[Ayers](#), 28, was fatally shot outside a gas station in Toccoa, Ga., where he had stopped to withdraw money from an ATM. Security video showed a speeding black SUV pull alongside his car as he prepared to leave and plainclothes police officers jumping out and shouting orders to him to get out of the car.

Instead, Ayers tried to drive away. Police fired at the car, wounding Ayers. Ayers crashed his vehicle a short distance down the road. He was taken to a hospital and died following surgery.

Officers said Ayers was not a part of an ongoing drug investigation, but

they wanted to question him because he had just given a ride to a woman who was. Police said Ayers nearly ran over the officers while attempting to flee.

Friends and family of Ayers said he probably was trying to run away because he didn't know the men were police and probably thought they were going to rob him. They said he had been ministering to the woman for some time trying to convince her to turn her life around and had given her a ride and money moments before the shooting.

The district attorney's office reported Nov. 12 it had received a copy of the GBI investigative report and was reviewing it to see if a follow-up investigation was warranted. The DA also brought in two outside prosecutors to assist, and Rickman offered to recuse himself if the family desired.

"I want to make sure it's as transparent" and as "fair" as possible, Rickman told the *Journal-Constitution*.

Supporters of the Ayers family rallied Oct. 3 in a vigil to remember the slain pastor and call for justice in his death. Participants said they did not want local officials to sweep the investigation under a rug. A second march and rally is scheduled Dec. 5 at the courthouse in Toccoa, Ga.

A [website](#) and [blog](#) were set up to draw attention to the story.

-Bob Allen is managing editor of Associated Baptist Press.

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