

September 20, 2015

Angie Hammond
100 Echota Trail
Seneca, SC 29672

The Honorable Nikki R. Haley
Office of the Governor
1205 Pendleton Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Dear Governor Haley,

My name is Angie Hammond, and I am the mother of Zachary Hammond, the teen who was shot and killed in Seneca, SC by officer Tiller. It has been almost 8 painstaking weeks since Zach died, and we still don't have a clear picture of what really happened that night.

On the night that Zach died, the coroner came to our house and first asked us if we had a son and then began to describe him. He said he was told his name was Zachary Hammond. Of course, we were shocked and devastated but didn't think much about that he had to ask us and describe him. He said that he was told by police that Zach had tried to run the officer over, that he had to shoot him in self-defense and that he had been shot twice in the chest. By all accounts, you would have thought that Zach was shot from the front of the car.

I believe it was the next day, I, along with my husband Paul, and some other family members, went to the coroner's office to see Zach. It just didn't seem real to us unless we could see him. The coroner was gracious to let us see him, to make a positive identification. While standing there with us, he verbally explained that Zach had been shot in the rear shoulder and in the back part of his side. He also explained that the second bullet exited out the other side lower than where it went in. He was obviously shaken by what he was telling us.

Putting two and two together, we felt that something was terribly wrong. He also explained to us that he personally had to cover Zach when he got there about 45 minutes later and was questioning the fact that he was left there totally exposed.

He had to get a sheet out of the ambulance himself to cover him. He also explained to us, in a visibly shaken voice, that Zach had been covered in ants, and that they had bitten him all over his body. We again were shocked and devastated that something like this had occurred.

Chief Covington told the press that "The undercover officer pulled up beside Hammond's car to buy the drugs, and the officer in uniform was coming up to help with any arrests when Hammond drove his car TOWARD the lawman". (USA Today/AP report) Another report from the Greenville News stated that according to the account of the incident given to media by Police Chief John Covington, the officer "fired two shots in self-defense" as Zachary "drove his vehicle directly at the officer" in the back parking lot of Hardee's restaurant on U.S. 123. Also, the same story, Covington said Tuesday that the car was turning toward the officer and he was in its path. The officer fired through the driver's side window to keep the car from hitting him as it approached from an angle, the chief said. "The car was still coming at him," he said.

Shortly after, my husband and I went to the police station to ask for the police report feeling that it may explain what happened that night. You had to ring a buzzer or bell to be let in, and Chief Covington himself opened the door for us. Standing with him was another officer whom we didn't know and we introduced ourselves. The chief never acknowledged us but turned his back, went in his office and shut the door! Again, we were shocked and devastated that he would do that to us, the parents of the boy that was just shot by one of his officers. The other officer told us that we could not have the police report; that we would have to get it from SLED. I must say that things were looking a little fishy, to say the least.

We felt, that in order to get a true picture of what occurred that night, we needed to have a second opinion so we had an independent autopsy performed. The results our autopsy confirmed what the coroner told us; Zach was shot from the back of his shoulder and side.

After our autopsy findings were released, Tiller's attorney came out with yet another version of what happened. According to the Huffington Post (August 10, 2015), Attorney Mussetto said "Rather than abide by his order, Mr. Hammond then rapidly reversed his vehicle towards Lt. Tillers patrol vehicle. Mr. Hammond then rapidly accelerated in the direction of Lt. Tiller, forcing the lieutenant to push off of Mr. Hammond's car to keep from being struck and run over." How many stories can be told? Mistrust of this police department is quickly building, not only by us but the public as well.

To make matters worse, it was reported that a Seneca police officer that was there that night lifted Zach's hand and gave him a "high five". Again, we were shocked,

devastated, and now disgusted. Shortly after, the officer "resigned". This is our son, not some trophy kill! First, they let him lie on the ground while ants bit his body like some animal and now this, how dare they! The lack of dignity for Zach and the lack of respect for us are appalling! We are thinking at this point, what kind of people were we dealing with?

Fast forward a few weeks; we still don't know what happened that fateful night and our trust in the system has been shaken. Too much has happened and too many stories from Seneca PD have caused us to mistrust them. There seems to be NO transparency and no one has offered to talk with us or even give us an advocate to explain the process and where the process was at any given point.

Our solicitor, Chrissy Adams, has done things to make us feel that she is trying to twist this to get her desired outcome; not to charge officer Tiller with the murder of our son. Not only has she done things in our case but in previous cases here as well. For example, she is known for reducing sentences and letting murderers go free with no charges or with very little sentencing such as in the Qualls case. She also dismisses witnesses, discrediting them so they can't be used as in the Hipps case. It is sad to say but we do not trust our solicitor.

I have tried to give you a little background into what we have been dealing with to plead with you to intervene or to at least look into the process; it doesn't work. It only leads to mistrust by the public and there is NO family involvement whatsoever. There has got to be a better way.

As you know, we filed a petition with the State Supreme Court asking for them to set a statewide precedent that would remove local prosecutors from reviewing police-involved shootings within their jurisdiction. We feel that it is necessary to keep it on a level playing field. We also ask that you look into the action of New York Governor Cuomo who named the state attorney general as a special prosecutor for police-related civilian deaths and do the same in our state. (NY Times, July 7, 2015)

We have a great state here but it could certainly be improved upon; so far this year our state has had the highest police shootings ever and Zach was number 29. This is not something I want our state to be known for. My family has voted for and supported you and thinks you have done great things for our state; we hope you will continue to do great things and change this system as we know it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Angie Hammond". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid.

Angie Hammond

WHO ZACH WAS

From the time Zach was born, he was full of life. Our mischievous little boy who was sweet but rambunctious; a typical boy to say the least. My dad called him Dennis the Menace, if that tells you anything. Ornerly and stubborn at times, but good at heart and very loveable. He loved to dress up and his favorite was Hercules!

He was smart, doing math problems in his head in the first grade. Early in his childhood, we would play chess together; although he never admitted doing that in his teen years! He also loved to build things, but most boys do don't they.

His favorite movies were Star Wars, Lord of The Rings, Harry Potter and Pirates of The Caribbean. I still have all of the figures from those movies and there are a lot of them! As he grew older he loved strategy games and his favorite was the Total War series for the computer.

He absolutely loved history and he could remember dates and people like nobody's business. His dad and he would talk endlessly about the wars and old civilizations; he seemed to like the Roman Empire the best.

Zach loved anything physical and everything outdoors. He had great friends and our house was THE house to come to, which was always ok with me! He played soccer and his team went to state one year. He also played baseball but was bored with that pretty early on; didn't move enough for him. After soccer, he played football and loved it but didn't think he was big enough to play on the high school level so he took to wrestling but didn't like it too much either. One of his favorite things to do was play Airsoft. We would have boys all over our yard along with the airsoft pellets! He loved to ride his dirt bike and when he was old enough, had a moped that he drove everywhere with his best friend on the back. Everyone remembers seeing Zach on that moped!

Zach was a funny guy, always laughing, making faces and telling jokes, even if only he thought they were funny. I loved seeing him laugh for he had a great smile!

Teachers, friends and family have always spoken well of him; saying that he was well mannered, polite and quiet. When working, he was reliable, always there and on time and worked hard at his job. Was he perfect? Absolutely not, but neither am I, nor or you. We all made mistakes as teenagers; that's how we learn. By God's grace, we made it through those years. We got the chance to grow up and make something of our life. I have NO doubt that Zach was on his way to being a great man, husband and father, had he been given the chance.