

**The SOMA Black Parents Workshop, Inc.** is standing behind Maplewood resident Jason McDougall and his family in his pursuit of justice for the wrongs committed against him by Maplewood police on July 5, 2016. Mr. McDougall has retained attorney Robert L. Tarver, Jr. in filing a federal lawsuit against the Maplewood police department. Mr. Tarver also serves as the counsel to the Black Parents Workshop.

Sixteen-year old Jason McDougall was among Black youth herded toward neighboring Irvington by the Maplewood police, under the direct orders of Chief Robert Cimino, on July 5, 2016 after the town's Independence Day fireworks. He was assaulted by Maplewood police officers, subjected to racial epithets, slammed to the ground, sprayed with mace, punched and kicked. He, like the other youth corralled that evening by the Maplewood police, was simply trying to return home.

Attorney Tarver said, "No one should have to endure what Mr. McDougall encountered that evening. No parent should have to discover that their son or daughter was abused in this manner. Jason simply wanted to get to his home in Maplewood. The audio and video evidence shows that these officers were intent on herding these children out of Maplewood at any cost. Apparently they decided that there was no way Jason or other black youths could possibly have lived in Maplewood. There was no consideration given to the fact that these were children."

Walter Fields, chairman of the SOMA Black Parents Workshop, notes, "What this represents is an important step in repairing the damage to Jason McDougall's reputation and standing as a member of this community by the actions of Chief Robert Cimino and the Maplewood police department."

The Township of Maplewood resisted releasing the police audio and video recordings of the evening of July 5, 2016 despite OPRA filings by a Columbia High School teacher, Thomas Whittaker, and the local *Village Green* newspaper. The SOMA Black Parents Workshop also demanded the release of the recordings. The township only relented after the recent ruling by the New Jersey Supreme Court

in *NJMG v. Lyndhurst* that determined police video recordings were part of the public record and subject to OPRA. In the process of waiting for the formal release of the recordings the SOMA Black Parents Workshop learned that Chief Cimino had shared the video with select members of the community who had not filed through OPRA. Mayor Vic De Luca stated in a *Village Green* newspaper article that the chief made a “unilateral” decision to violate OPRA procedures.

Local high school teacher Thomas Whitaker, founder of the MapSO Freedom School, stated, “While the federal lawsuit announced today marks a sad day for Maplewood Township, it also provides an opportunity to begin the healing process. The actions of local police under the leadership of Chief Cimino and Captain Cummis can only be resolved when the McDougall family receives justice.”

Fields added, “What makes this incident so offensive and unsettling is that our police engaged in this recklessness fully knowing that there is a network of cameras surveilling our town’s streets. They simply did not care. Mr. McDougall, and the other youth, were treated as if they were in apartheid South Africa and were guilty of traveling without their passbooks. For parents of Black children in Maplewood, and our sister community of South Orange, it is unacceptable that our tax dollars are supporting such rogue behavior by our police. We demand justice for Mr. McDougall and all of our youth that had their rights violated on July 5, 2016.”

Attorney Tarver noted, “The unnecessary and unwarranted use of force is clearly and plainly captured on video for all to see. There is no ambiguity or gray area in what happened here. We cannot allow the actions that everyone has seen on this video to go unaddressed. Jason McDougall is a member of this community. He is a graduate of Columbia High School. His parents are taxpayers. There must be accountability.”

On August 1, 2017 concerned citizens of Maplewood and South Orange staged a “Justice Night Out” protest to counter the Maplewood police department’s National Night Out event. Protesters then converged on the Maplewood Township Committee meeting held that evening. At that meeting, the township’s governing body

passed three unanimous votes to express no-confidence in Chief Robert Cimino, demand the chief's resignation, and place the chief on paid administrative leave. The Township Committee also introduced representatives from the firm Hillard Heintze that has been retained to evaluate the Maplewood police department and offer recommendations based upon its findings.

The SOMA Black Parents Workshop subsequently wrote New Jersey Attorney General Christopher S. Porrino requesting his office investigate the July 5, 2016 incident, oversee the Maplewood police department during the investigation, and monitor the work of Hillard Heintze.

Attorney Tarver remarked, "This is a time when we must appeal to the federal judicial system to vindicate Mr. McDougall and confirm that no one, not even police officers, is above the law."

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