

# Strickland Says Spaziani Report Is 'Poppycock'

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Northampton County Dist. Atty. Charles H. Spaziani's report clearing Easton policemen of criminal wrongdoing in the slaying of a man Sept. 23 is being criticized for its legal and factual findings.

At a panel discussion held Sunday night on the shooting of Robert V. Strickland, 25, the report was labeled "poppycock" and preconceived by James Strickland, a brother of the deceased.

"I think he (Spaziani) made the decision the night my brother was killed," Strickland said of the district attorney's finding of "justifiable homicide" in the case. "I think it was a bunch of poppycock," Strickland said.

When told the panelists had questioned his report, Spaziani this morning said, "I'm not dignifying what they said with an answer."

Also participating in the discussion was Donald MacRae, president of the Lehigh Valley Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, and Marvin Boyer, a member of the Citizens Coalition of Easton, formed to protest the shooting.

Boyer and Strickland raised several questions in regard to the incident. Some of them are:

•Why weren't police stationed outside the rear window through which Strickland is said to have escaped?

"They should have secured that exit," Strickland told the approximately 35 persons at the meeting.

•Why was a second shot necessary if Strickland was already hit? Boyer, who raised the question, said all eyewitnesses to the shooting but one said Strickland was hit by Crouse's first shot. These witnesses said Strickland appeared to be limping or running in an odd fashion toward a low wall along Canal Street.

•Boyer said investigators reported Strickland could not have carried a weapon larger than a .25-caliber hand gun. This is because he was dressed in high-waisted pants with a shirt that "barely covered his ribs," Boyer went on. Boyer questioned the need for the second shot, if Strickland could at most have had a small-caliber weapon that would have been fired by a wounded man at police partially concealed behind foliage along the wall.

•Although investigators have reported Strickland was not shot in the back, Boyer claimed photographs of the body show there was a wound in the lower back.

James Strickland also said the four policemen involved should be suspended.

Strickland was critical of the credibility the police seemed to have with investigators, since two of the officers allegedly lied at first about the incident.

Also called into question

was the availability of a pathology report on Robert Strickland. Boyer said Spaziani promised the Strickland family a copy of that report. According to James Strickland, "Nobody's seen it yet."

Boyer reported Spaziani's interpretation of that section of Pennsylvania state law dealing with use of deadly force by a policeman has been questioned by Robert Vogel, a state assistant attorney general. He said Vogel raised the issue at a meeting preceding the release of Spaziani's report Thursday.

The discussion was held at the Lehigh Valley Friends Meeting House in Hanover Township (Northampton County), and sponsored by the Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern.

According to Spaziani's report, four officers were sent to the Kennedy Gardens apartment building, where Strickland was believed to be. Two officers went to the front door, the report said, adding Strickland fled through a rear window and was pursued by Patrolman Joseph Crouse, who shouted a warning, then fired his 12-gauge shotgun at the suspect. Strickland then fled across Canal Street and into the Lehigh Valley Railroad yard. There he turned toward Crouse and reached for his waist, the report said, and Crouse fired again. No weapon was found on Strickland.

The report also stated an earlier version of the incident, which had one of the other four officers, John Harman also firing, was a fabrication by the two policemen.

The police department is investigating the accusation.

In another matter related to the shooting and Spaziani's report, the Citizens Coalition Friday rejected the finding of justifiable homicide.

Calling the report "technically thorough," the coalition went on to label the conclusions "poorly drawn, inconsistent with findings, biased and subjective."

"The coalition finds the report to be arbitrarily selective and suspiciously weighted against most eyewitness accounts of citizens viewing the shooting," the group said.

It also criticized what it said were inadequate measures to guard all exits to the building where Strickland was staying, adding it believes "the act of the officer who fired his weapon to be excessive and unnecessary, which actions must be held accountable to the public and due process."