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NYC to Pay \$4.1M to Akai Gurley Family in Wrongful Death Suit

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Kimberly Ballinger, Gurley's partner, charged Officers Liang and Landau of negligence and recklessness in the suit.

The City of New York will have to pay over US\$4.1 million in a wrongful death settlement to the family of Akai Gurley, according to a family lawyer, the Daily News reported Monday.

Gurley was an unarmed Black man killed in the stairwell of his Brooklyn public housing by Peter Liang, a rookie police officer found guilty of manslaughter, whose sentence was commuted to probation and community service in April.

The city will be responsible for paying US\$4.1 million, the New York City Housing Authority will pay US\$400,000, while Liang will pay US\$25,000, said Scott Rynecki, attorney for Gurley's partner, Kimberly Ballinger.

"I'm glad it's all done. I'm pleased with the outcome," Ballinger told the Daily News.

Brooklyn Supreme Court Justice Dawn Jimenez-Salta approved the settlement late in the afternoon after two months of negotiations.

The money will go into a fund for the couple's 4-year-old daughter, Akaila Gurley, that can be accessed once she is 18 years old and will be invested in hopes of providing her with a larger sum at that time.

The wrongful death suit filed by Ballinger charged Liang and his partner Shaun Landau of negligence and recklessness and NYCHA for failure to repair a light bulb in the stairwell that was pitch black at the time of the shooting.

New York City has had to pay out two major settlements to families of unarmed Black men killed by police in the past year and a half, although the police officers involved were never tried for the killings.

In July 2015, a year after Eric Garner's killing, his estate was awarded US\$5.9 million. Officer Daniel Pantaleo choked Garner to death on Staten Island on July 17, 2014 and was not even indicted for the murder.

The city paid US\$3.9 million to the family of teenager, Ramarley Graham in January 2015. Graham was shot to death by Officer Richard Haste in the bathroom of his apartment on Feb. 2, 2012. All charges were dropped against Haste and as with Pantaleo, he never faced trial.

Gurley lived in the Louis Pink Houses in East New York. As he and a friend were going down the stairs because the elevator was out, Liang and Landau were patrolling the building.

In violation of police procedure, Liang had his gun out and his finger on the trigger, eventually firing a shot out of nowhere, hitting Gurley as it ricocheted off the wall.

Gurley collapsed and the officers argued about what to do next. As Gurley lay dying, the officers feebly tried to resuscitate him and Gurley died minutes later.

On February 10, 2015, Liang was indicted by a grand jury on manslaughter, assault and other criminal charges. Liang was found guilty of manslaughter and official misconduct on February 11, 2016.

But on April 19, Brooklyn Supreme Court Justice Danny Chun downgraded Liang's manslaughter conviction to criminally negligent homicide, sentencing him to five years of probation and 800 hours community service.

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