

MINNEAPOLIS

Ex-Minneapolis police officer charged with beating man during unrest makes first court appearance

As a condition of his release, Justin Stetson will not seek employment as a police officer in Minnesota.

By Kim Hyatt (<https://www.startribune.com/kim-hyatt/6370466/>) Star Tribune |

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An ex-Minneapolis police officer charged with beating a man during the civil unrest after George Floyd's murder made his first appearance Thursday in court, where he agreed to conditions of his release that include not seeking employment as a peace officer in Minnesota.

The state Attorney General's Office charged Justin Stetson in December with third-degree assault for allegedly repeatedly punching and kicking Jaleel Stallings after Stallings had shot at officers who without warning had fired projectiles at him from an unmarked van while on patrol the night of May 30, 2020.

This year, the city paid Stallings a [\\$1.5 million settlement](https://www.startribune.com/minneapolis-to-pay-1-5-million-jaleel-stallings-police-shot-at-less-lethal-rounds-from-unmarked-van/600173976/) (<https://www.startribune.com/minneapolis-to-pay-1-5-million-jaleel-stallings-police-shot-at-less-lethal-rounds-from-unmarked-van/600173976/>) after a jury acquitted him of eight felonies, including attempted murder. He filed a federal lawsuit [accusing 19 Minneapolis officers](https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/21095151-1docstall) (<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/21095151-1docstall>) of violating his constitutional rights.

Stetson, 34 of Nowthen, and his attorney, Fred Bruno, declined to comment.

By agreeing to all conditions of his release, Stetson did not have to pay \$40,000 bail. The conditions include having no contact with Stallings, who no longer lives in the state, and no firearms or ammunition. He also must attend all court appearances.

His next court hearing is slated for Feb. 16.

Stetson also agreed to no longer seek employment as a peace officer. His license is no longer active.

He was hired by the city in 2008 and became a sworn Minneapolis Police Department officer in 2011. The local watchdog group Citizens United Against Police Brutality found that during his tenure, Stetson had been the subject of at least 12 complaints.

He was fired by the department in August, according to two sources with knowledge of the investigation, and now draws a state pension of nearly \$59,000 a year.



A still from an injured was allege

When he and other officers swarmed Stallings shortly before 11 p.m. in a south Minneapolis parking lot off Lake Street, Stetson kicked him four times in the face and head, punched him six times, delivered five knee strikes to his face and slammed Stallings' head onto the pavement. He did not stop until a sergeant intervened and said, "That's it, stop!" according to the criminal complaint.

Stallings, an Army veteran with a permit to carry a weapon, said he fired back in attempt to defend himself against shots from unknown assailants. He surrendered — facedown and arms outstretched— but Stetson repeatedly struck him for 30 seconds.

[Body camera video \(https://video.startribune.com/body-camera-video-shows-beating-of-man-who-mistakenly-shot-at-minneapolis-police-george-floyd-unrest/600103951/\)](https://video.startribune.com/body-camera-video-shows-beating-of-man-who-mistakenly-shot-at-minneapolis-police-george-floyd-unrest/600103951/) released by Stallings' defense attorney Eric Rice shows Stallings repeatedly saying, "Listen, listen," while he is punched and kicked, resulting in a broken left eye socket.

"I think the solution is to bring these issues to light of the general public and allow them to weigh in and allow them to push our system toward greater justice," Rice said Thursday. He said corrective actions weren't taken until he released the video to media.

The Hennepin County Attorney's Office referred the case to the Attorney General's Office last spring. An expert in use of force found Stetson's actions were unreasonable and excessive.

But initially, County Attorney Mike Freeman, who had access to the body camera footage, charged Stallings. Freeman has since left office.

Rice said the criminal justice system at all levels has "a very hard problem policing itself." He said Stallings was out that night protesting the lack of police accountability, police violence, racism and the reluctance to prosecute officers.

"And look what happens to him," he said. "This is an encapsulation of exactly how that system works to make the same problems occur again and again."

Staff writer Liz Sawyer contributed to this report.

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