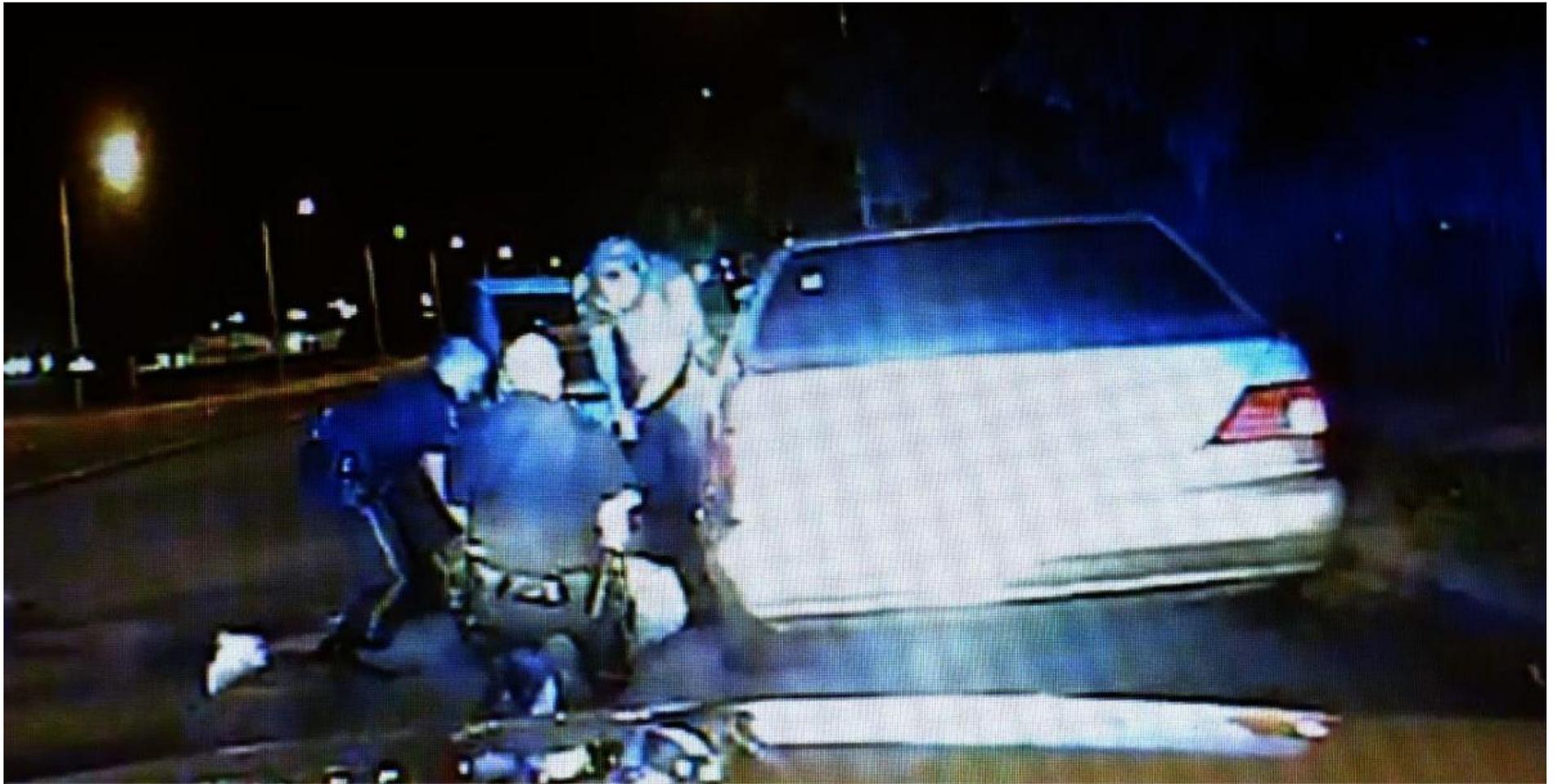


https://www.postandcourier.com/news/high-sum-in-michael-slager-lawsuit-adds-to-millions-in-north-charleston-police-payouts/article_1a860eec-6029-11e8-b481-c7975cc530fa.html

'High' sum in Michael Slager lawsuit adds to millions in North Charleston police payouts

BY ANDREW KNAPP AKNAPP@POSTANDCOURIER.COM

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Video from a North Charleston police car shows Michael Slager (standing at right) fire his Taser at Julius Wilson, who has a pending lawsuit against Slager. File/North Charleston Police Department/Provided

North Charleston's insurer has paid out nearly \$300,000 to settle the last of three lawsuits filed against the city's police force and former officer Michael Slager after video emerged of Slager killing Walter Scott.

Julius Wilson got \$230,000 from the state Insurance Reserve Fund, which backs many governments in South Carolina, according to data obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request.

The fund also paid \$66,000 in legal expenses.

Slager jolted Wilson in the back with a Taser during a 2014 traffic stop that also was caught on video. Wilson contended that the force was unnecessary.

The 38-year-old had nearly abandoned a potential lawsuit until 2015, when a bystander's cellphone footage showed Slager shooting Scott in the back, casting a shadow over the officer's career and raising skepticism of the patrolman's escalating Taser use.

Finalized in March, the sum signals a continuing drumbeat of liability payouts against the North Charleston Police Department. The financial toll is mounting. For a six-year span that ended in 2011, nearly \$1 million was used to resolve claims against the Police Department, a Post and Courier analysis of the state data showed. Over the six years since then, the total ballooned to almost \$5.2 million.

All told since 2005, more than \$6.6 million has been dished out. That doesn't include the \$5.5 million the city spent from its own pockets to settle Scott's case.

Other recent settlements include a \$250,000 payment to James Terry, an unruly suspect who was handcuffed in late 2016 when a North Charleston officer punched him. The officer was fired but later acquitted of a misdemeanor charge.

Officials had blamed the bevy of litigation on rising scrutiny of police actions across the U.S., particularly those that play out on video for all to see.

Sandy Senn, a state senator and West Ashley attorney for North Charleston's insurer, said Wilson's settlement was "very high" but that the pace of police claims is subsiding.

"With officer Slager's name attached to the suit and since he was not going to participate in the case, the defense was hamstrung," Senn said. "Fortunately, however, we are seeing a decline in cases against the police.

"Overwhelmingly, our police officers' actions are admirable."

PAYOUTS ON RISE

Settlements and legal expenses that the Insurance Reserve Fund has paid out for North Charleston police since 2005:

2005: \$13,975.32

2006: \$85,958.79

2007: \$56,634.16

2008: \$33,343.19

2009: \$188,216.88

2010: \$354,262.78

2011: \$277,600.13

2012: \$247,112.98

2013: \$340,862.76

2014: \$434,705.66

2015: \$753,302.61

2016: \$2,257,651.20

2017: \$1,233,466.33

2018: \$355,715.62 (through early March)

Total: \$6,632,808.41

Source: Insurance Reserve Fund

Wilson's attorneys, John Gentry and Nicholas Clekis of Charleston, declined to comment Friday, citing a confidentiality provision in the settlement.

Wilson was one of three men to step forward after Scott's death and announce plans to sue the city over Taser confrontations with Slager. Mario Givens and Jerome Stanley have already resolved their cases for a total \$80,000.

Wilson's traffic stop bore similarities to Scott's. Both black men were stopped because of a broken brake light. North Charleston police once used traffic stops to look for greater crimes afoot, but critics said the tactic unfairly affected minority communities.

The lawman who stopped Wilson mentioned a spate of robberies and shootings. Slager showed up as a backup officer.

After Wilson refused to step from the car and reached for something — he later said it was his cellphone — the officers pulled him out.

Wilson said he stopped resisting arrest when one officer pointed a gun at him. But Slager said in a report that Wilson kept refusing to put his hands behind his back.

Slager hit Wilson in the back with his Taser's prongs.

The officers said they later found a wooden club in Wilson's car.



Shortly after video emerged of Michael Slager shooting Walter Scott in 2015, Julius Wilson talks about a 2014 confrontation with the North Charleston police officer in which Wilson said he was wrongfully shot with a Taser. File/Andrew Knapp/Staff

Wilson didn't file a complaint with the police until after the Scott video surfaced.

His civil rights lawsuit survived several key legal rulings in federal court, leading to the recent settlement.

Slager, meanwhile, pleaded guilty last year to violating Scott's civil rights and was sentenced to 20 years behind bars. He remains at a federal prison in Colorado.

That Slager is imprisoned made the lawsuit difficult to fend off, city attorney Brad Hair said. Like Senn, though, Hair sees a decline in other cases being filed.

"I'll keep my fingers crossed that the trend continues," he said.

Reach **Andrew Knapp** at 843-937-5414. Follow him on Twitter @offlede.

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ANDREW KNAPP

Andrew Knapp is editor of the Quick Response Team, which covers crime, courts and breaking news. He previously worked as a reporter and copy editor at Florida Today, Newsday and Bangor (Maine) Daily News. He enjoys golf, weather and fatherhood.