

Former Hammond cop charged in shooting death of his children's mother

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2017 Cop Domestic Violence Murder Kevin Campbell

Portage Police Chief Troy Williams said there might have been a financial motive for former Hammond and Gary police officer Kevin Campbell to take the life of his ex-girlfriend and the mother of three of his children, Tiara Thomas, last month in a Portage apartment complex.

Campbell, 31, of the 6100 block of Wisconsin Street in Hobart, was charged Wednesday and taken into custody shortly before 6 a.m. Thursday. Police arrested Campbell outside his home as he left to take his wife to work, Williams said at a Thursday press conference at the Portage Police Department.

Williams said Campbell ran from his driveway north to the side of his yard before he gave himself up. The Portage Police SWAT Team assisted with the arrest because though he was recently fired from the Hammond Police Department, he owned multiple firearms and still had soft body armor, Williams said.

Campbell was taken into custody and transported to Porter County Jail without further incident. The case has been assigned to Porter Superior Court Judge Roger Bradford. Because Campbell is charged with murder, it is expected he will be held without bond. His initial hearing is scheduled via videoconference for 3 p.m. Friday.

"Regrettably, Mr. Campbell was a police officer at the time of this crime and thus tarnished the badge. But make no mistake; Mr. Campbell stopped being a police officer the moment he pulled the trigger," Williams said. "In a time around the country when some have distrust for the police, Mr. Campbell did nothing to help that cause. I believe Mr. Campbell's callous and calculating actions go to show the type of person he truly is."

According to charging documents filed Wednesday, Campbell's vehicle had been repossessed and he and Thomas argued about his payment of \$1,495 a month in child support and how the money was spent. He had a bank account balance of \$7.58 at the time of Thomas' death, and police found numerous voicemails from creditors on his cellphone, the probable cause affidavit said.

"We believe there was some financial motive to this," Williams said. "There seem to be a lot of things that built up for Mr. Campbell. Being a police officer, you would hope he wouldn't take the type of action that he took."

Thomas, 30, was discovered by her fiance on her bedroom floor with several gunshot wounds around 7:30 a.m. Nov. 18 when her fiancé returned from work to their apartment in the 5900

block of Old Porter Road in the Park Place apartment complex.

She died a short time later at Methodist Hospital Northlake Campus in Gary. She suffered gunshot wounds to the chest, head and both wrists.

"As our investigation progressed, Tiara's ex-husband, Kevin A. Campbell, became a person of interest due to several deceptive and misleading statements that we knew to be false," Williams said. Police said those statements had to do with the whereabouts of Campbell's cellphone, which according to charging documents was found with Campbell's father when the two went to the police station for questioning the day of the murder.

"As our case continued and as our evidence mounted, it became clear that Mr. Campbell was the main suspect," Williams said.

Campbell had his children with Thomas, who lived with her, stay at his Hobart residence the night before the murder, the affidavit said.

The court document said he left his residence at 4:37 a.m. Nov. 18, drove to Thomas' apartment, where his cellphone pinged to a nearby cell tower at 5:38 a.m., and returned home at 5:55 a.m. in time to get his children ready to attend school in Portage.

Thomas' fiancé told police it was unusual for Campbell to have the children overnight during the week because he would have to get up early and drive the children back to Portage for school.

The return trip to Portage the day of Thomas' death included a stop at Columbus Park in Lake Station before Campbell dropped his oldest child off at Willowcreek Middle School, the affidavit said. The child told police his father "stopped the vehicle at the park and removed a bag that he took to an unknown location in the park. When he returned, he was not carrying the bag," the documents said. A police search of the park did not locate the bag.

Police said in the charging documents that there was no forced entry to the apartment and Thomas' fiancé found the deadbolt unlocked when he returned home from work, which was unusual because she always locked the door at night.

Campbell asked his oldest child to make sure he had his house key for a Nov. 6 overnight visit, the court document said.

Hammond Police Chief John Doughty said Campbell, a former Gary police officer, was hired Jan. 12 and was placed on administrative leave Nov. 18, after Portage police contacted him and said Campbell was a person of interest in Thomas' shooting death.

He was terminated from the Hammond department on Nov. 23. He previously worked as an officer with the Gary Police Department for four years, where he was a member of the department's Region STOP Team.

The day after Thomas' death, police released a picture of a 2003 black Ford with gray trim they said may have been at Thomas' apartment complex.

Court documents state that Portage detectives determined Campbell was driving the truck, which belonged to his father, because his vehicle was repossessed on Nov. 13.

Williams thanked police chiefs in Hammond, Gary and Portage, as well as Porter County Sheriff David Reynolds, for their assistance with the case, as well as his department's detectives.

"I would like to extend my sympathies to the Thomas family for the loss of Tiara," Williams said. "This was a senseless crime which now leaves behind three children without a mother and four children without a father for much of their lives."

Amy Lavalley is a freelance reporter for the Post-Tribune.

CORRECTION:

Police initially referred to Tiara Thomas as Kevin Campell's "ex-wife," but the two were never married. Information in the story and two quotes from Portage Police Chief Troy Williams have been adjusted to make clear the relationship between Thomas and Campbell.

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