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## New AG Meets with Baltimore Leaders, Police and Activists

By Freddie Allen  
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[Compiled from Pool Reports]

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Keeping her promise to ensure, "both strength and fairness, for the protection of both the needs of victims and the rights of all" in the criminal justice system, Attorney General Loretta Lynch traveled to Baltimore Tuesday to meet with city officials, law enforcement and community stakeholders to encourage closer ties between police and the residents that they are sworn to protect. The same day Lynch was sworn-in and just a few hours after Freddie Gray's funeral, dozens of people, most described as teenagers and adults, looted shoe stores and burned local businesses and police vehicles. On April 12, Gray, a 25 year-old Black man, was chased and arrested by police officers. While in police custody, Gray suffered a severed spinal cord and a crushed voice box and died a week later. Gray's death and viral cell phone footage of his encounter with police, sparked nationwide protests. Last week, the Justice Department dispatched Vanita Gupta, the head of the Civil Rights Division, and Ronald Davis, the director of Community Oriented Policing Services, to Baltimore for a series of meetings with faith and civic leaders and community stakeholders to discuss the best path forward to mend the fractured relationship between Baltimore's police force and the majority Black communities that they serve in city's poorest neighborhoods. On Friday, Baltimore State's Attorney Marilyn Mosby filed charges against six Baltimore police officers that ranged from second-degree assault to "depraved heart murder."

During a meeting with Maryland United States Senators Barbara Mikulski (D) and Ben Cardin (D) and Congressmen Elijah Cummings, Charles W. Grassley and Dutch Ruppersberger, Lynch said it was inspiring to see people come together to reclaim the city. "We're here to hold your hands and provide support," said Lynch to the group that also included William H. "Billy" Murphy Jr., the Gray family's attorney, and Rev. Donte L. Hickman, Sr., the pastor of Southern Baptist Church, whose community resource center and senior housing complex were destroyed by fire while still under construction during the riots on April 27. She also vowed that the Justice Department was there to help the city move forward and work to improve the Baltimore Police Department (B.P.D.). Lynch then met with Police Commissioner Anthony Batts privately and then with a small group of police officers who she called the "hardest-working police officers in America."

Lynch added: "To all of you on the front lines, I want to thank you. You really have become the face of law enforcement."

Last fall, the Justice Department partnered with Baltimore officials to address concerns about abuse in the city's police department. "I have worked on this issue for years," said Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, the mayor of Baltimore. "We can't afford to fail. The relationship between police and the community is like a marriage."

Lynch also met with Baltimore United, a community group that advocates for police reform, and others who had lost loved ones to police violence.



Attorney General Loretta Lynch speaks during her swearing-in ceremony at the Justice Department. Lynch traveled to Baltimore on May 5 to discuss improving ties between the police and Black residents. (Freddie Allen/NNPA News Wire)

## Police recover gun from Zimmerman, 2 guns from other man

By Mike Schneider

ORLANDO, Florida. (AP) - Police say they have recovered a handgun from George Zimmerman and took two guns from a man accused of shooting at Zimmerman. He is a former neighborhood watch volunteer security guard acquitted two years ago in the death of a young unarmed African American.

The case sparked protests and a national debate about race relations. The U.S. Justice department later announced it was not bringing a civil rights case against Zimmerman.

The shooting is the latest in a series of run-ins Zimmerman has had with the law, random strangers and his ex-wife.

In Lake Mary, an Orlando suburb, Police Officer Bianca Gillett said May 5 that detectives are still investigating and no charges have been filed against Zimmerman or Matthew Apperson.

Zimmerman and Apperson were involved in a road-rage episode earlier this year, but no charges were filed in that case.

Two guns were taken from Apperson's car, including a revolver that had a spent shell casing. Police say they will also execute a search warrant on Zimmerman's pickup truck.

Both men had the guns legally. Police say the shooting occurred Monday on a busy road. Zimmerman suffered minor injuries.

## New Congressional Caucus Champions HBCUs

By Jazelle Hunt

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - A little help may be on the way for historically Black colleges and universities struggling against falling financial support and an increasingly skeptical public. The Bipartisan Congressional HBCU Caucus was launched last week, with Congressional members Representatives Alma Adams (D-N.C.) and Bradley Byrne (R-Ala.) at the helm. Its 45 members are charged with safeguarding the interests of historically Black colleges and universities, supporting students and graduates; creating a national dialogue; and educating other members of Congress on the value of these institutions.

"This bipartisan HBCU Caucus is bringing together champions of HBCUs, so that we can make an even bigger impact to ensure their needs are heard in every aspect of policy making and across party lines," said Rep. Adams, creator and co-chair of the caucus, at a launch event for the caucus. Adams is a professor at North Carolina A&T State University, and former administrator at her alma mater and Bennett College, both in Greensboro, N.C.

"[HBCUs] do what no other schools do for students like me, a young Black girl from Newark, New Jersey who came to North Carolina - wasn't fully prepared - but yet North Carolina took me in, got me prepared, and I was able to do what I'm doing right now."

The caucus comes at a time when HBCUs are facing a barrage of challenges. In 2011, Congress put more funding toward need-based grants, but lowered the cap to 12 semesters (or six school years) instead of the previous 18. Non-traditional students, such as parents, veterans, and people beyond their early 20s, as well as low-income students who work part-time, often have complicated circumstances that make it difficult to go straight through four years of school full time. For such students, it can take several years to earn a degree.

"Many of our young people really do have to work to pay for education. So a large majority of students we serve at our HBCUs in particular are on financial aid - several types of financial aid," said Rep. Adams at a launch event for the Caucus. "We talk about access and affordability. You don't have access if you don't have the checkbook to go with it."

The same year, federal parent PLUS loan requirements were changed in an effort to keep financially burdened families from taking on more debt. The changes went into effect almost immediately, and thousands of previously approved parents were abruptly denied a renewal. As a result thousands of students - largely Black, low-income, and first-generation - were forced to pause or delay their college educations. According to data from the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, enrollment at HBCUs fell 4 percent for fall 2012. The number of students with PLUS loans fell 46 percent, and HBCUs saw a 36 percent decrease in the awarded dollar amounts. That meant fewer students able to continue college, and less revenue for the schools.

The Obama administration has corrected this oversight, but the damage has been done.

"Our parents spend much more money on educating their children than White families do. That's just a fact, if you look at percentage of income," said caucus member Rep. James E. Clyburn (D-SC) at the same event. "We're talking about good students who need an opportunity, who need to go into an environment that's nurturing. So we're going to have to fight for these HBCUs."

There is also less aid available for institutions. According to a 2014 report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, state schools now rely on students fees and tuition for 48 percent of their revenues, compared to 24 percent in 1988. Of the nation's 105 HBCUs, nearly half are state schools. Meanwhile, Texas, North Carolina, South Carolina, West Virginia, Virginia, Arkansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Florida, and Delaware were all caught withholding state funds specifically from their HBCUs.

The Department of Education shells out roughly \$300 million for Black schools each year. But this funding, like all federal money, can change without warning from year to year. Howard University, for example, is a private school, but has historically had its own line in the budget that serves as a critical source of funding. In 2012, this funding was cut by more than \$12 million, and has remained at that amount each year since.



Representative Alma Adams (D-N.C.), shown here, partnered with Bradley Byrne (R-Ala.) to launch the Bipartisan Congressional HBCU Caucus. (Courtesy Photo)

## Judge: Officer's trial in shooting death won't be moved

By Mitch Weiss

CHARLOTTE (AP) - The trial of a white Charlotte police officer accused of fatally shooting an unarmed black man won't be moved to another county despite extensive publicity about the case, a judge ruled May 8.

Attorneys for Randall Kerrick had said it's unlikely he can get a fair trial in Mecklenburg County because of heavy news coverage that they said would prejudice jurors.

Prosecutors say the 28-year-old Kerrick fatally shot 24-year-old Jonathan Ferrell, a former Florida A&M football player, on Sept. 14, 2013. Kerrick was arrested the day of the shooting. He was later indicted for voluntary manslaughter, which carries a prison sentence of up to 11 years.

Kerrick's attorneys say interest in the case has increased because of the national debate about race and aggressive police tactics that begin in August with the shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. In the last month alone, several high-profile cases have fueled the issue. A white North Charleston, South Carolina, police officer was charged with shooting an unarmed black man in the back after a witness captured the encounter on his cellphone. And there was rioting in Baltimore after the death of a black man who was severely injured while in police custody.

"You have to take all of these things into account," Michael Greene told Judge Robert Ervin, who was hearing the motion for a change of venue.

Greene said prosecutors have described Ferrell as an "unarmed black man" looking for help. While Greene said the defense would prove that wasn't the case, he said they'd be hard pressed to find jurors in Mecklenburg County who hadn't heard that account.

But Steve Arbogast, a prosecutor with the state Attorney General's Office, said he believes Kerrick could get a fair trial.

Ervin said he faced a quandary. "Where would you move the case?" he asked. Since it has garnered national attention, even people in surrounding counties have heard of it.

"I don't see where I can go to get away from the publicity," the judge said.

He said they would try to seat a jury in Mecklenburg County. If they couldn't, he would revisit the issue. The trial is expected to begin in July.

The prosecution and defense also discussed other motions, offering a window into how they intend to approach the case.

Prosecutors say the shooting was a case of excessive force, while defense attorneys say Kerrick acted in self-defense.

The judge said he would rule later on a motion filed by Kerrick's attorney to let the jury see the shooting site.

After Ferrell crashed his car, he went to a nearby home and banged on the door for help. But the resident called police, saying someone was trying to break into her house.

Three officers responded to the scene, thinking they were dealing with a home invasion. Investigators say Kerrick fired 12 shots, 10 of which hit Ferrell. One of the officers used a Taser on Ferrell, but Kerrick was the only officer who fired his gun.

George Laughrun, one of Kerrick's attorneys, told the judge it will be important for the jury to go to the scene at night to see what the officers saw.

## NC chapter of NAACP to question state on voter registration

RALEIGH (AP) - The North Carolina chapter of the NAACP wants the state to answer to what it says is a low number of voter registration applications the state has received from public assistance agencies in the last three years.

Chapter leaders and the Forward Together Moral Movement say they plan to visit the Department of Administration on May 11 to submit a public records request regarding the records.

According to the NAACP, in 2012, 41,162 registration applications were submitted from public assistance agencies. The next year, it says the number dropped to 18,758, and down again in 2014 to 13,340.

The groups will then hold a news conference at 10 a.m. to discuss the findings and how they expect Gov. Pat McCrory and his office to address them.