

Long Island

Police arrested wrong man in Dejah Joyner's death, lawyer says

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By Bridget Murphy



The attorney for a man facing a murder charge in the slaying of a 12-year-old Hempstead girl who was shot in the head in October when a bullet burst into her home said Wednesday his client told police they arrested the wrong man.

Jakwan Keller, 20, appeared briefly in a Mineola court packed with extra security as attorney Bruce Barket took over as his defense lawyer.

Relatives of victim Dejah Joyner, including her mother, were among those present, as were supporters of Keller.

Barket told a judge he wanted Keller released from jail by Friday unless a grand jury had indicted his client or a judge found probable cause for Keller's arrest after a felony hearing in open court.

"He's devastated by the false accusations made against him," Barket said after court of Keller. "My understanding is one of the things he said to the police was that, 'You've arrested me but don't stop investigating because I haven't done it. I didn't do it.' "

The Nassau County district attorney's office declined to comment Wednesday.

Dejah's killing prompted community outrage and an extensive hunt for a suspect in her death. A portion of Dartmouth Street, the street she lived on, was renamed in her honor.

Police have said an incident involving warring factions in the Bloods street gang led to the fatal October shooting. They've alleged Keller fired a bullet into Dejah's home in retaliation for someone stealing a hoverboard from his younger brother.

Acting Police Commissioner Thomas Krumpter has alleged Keller believed Dejah's older brother stole the hoverboard and that the two are in different Bloods factions.

Barket called the victim's death "a horrific tragedy," but said his client was entitled to the presumption of innocence.

"We've all seen cases where individuals have been charged with horrific crimes, only to find out later that they're absolutely innocent," he added.

The defense attorney also said there was "no relationship at all" between the victim's family and his client, and said they didn't know each other.

Barket said he hadn't yet seen any evidence from the Nassau district attorney's office, was just hired this week and would do an investigation into the case.

The lawyer's firm already represents Keller in a federal lawsuit against Nassau County, Hempstead Village and members of both municipal police forces that alleges officers used excessive force while arresting him in 2012. In that case, charges included reckless endangerment, criminal mischief and resisting arrest.

Keller, who was led out of court as a supporter shouted out "I love you, man," is expected to appear in court again Friday.