

'Make sure justice is served': Slain Temple police sergeant's family calls for death penalty for suspect

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What to Know

- A Bucks County teenager is headed to trial in the shooting death of a Temple University police officer that happened 11 months ago near the North Philadelphia university's campus.
- Miles Pfeffer, now 19, waived his right Tuesday to a preliminary hearing on charges including murder of a law enforcement officer and robbery in the Feb. 19 slaying of 31-year-old Officer Christopher Fitzgerald.
- Family members of the slain officer said outside the courtroom Tuesday that they wanted to see Pfeffer sentenced to death.

As a Bucks County teen accused of [gunning down Temple University Police Sgt. Christopher Fitzgerald](#) last year was held for trial in Fitzgerald's February 2022 murder, the slain officer's family made sure they were in the courtroom Tuesday.

"We want to make sure justice is served," Fitzgerald's father, Joel Fitzgerald Sr., said outside the Center City Philadelphia courthouse. "We understand the importance of showing up."

The elder Fitzgerald -- flanked by the slain officer's widow and other family members -- spoke after Miles Pfeffer, now 19, appeared in court.

Pfeffer, of Buckingham Township, on Tuesday waived his right to a preliminary hearing on charges including murder, robbery and murder of a law enforcement officer in the Feb. 19 slaying of the 31-year-old Fitzgerald.

Authorities said, on the night of the incident, Fitzgerald spotted three people dressed in black and wearing masks in an area where there had been a series

of robberies and carjackings. He chased the trio, and after two of them hid he continued to pursue the third, police said.

Authorities allege that he caught up with Pfeffer and ordered him to the ground, and the two then struggled before Pfeffer pulled a handgun and fired. Fitzgerald was shot at least once and fell to the ground, police said. Police allege that Pfeffer then stood over Fitzgerald and shot him several times in the head and face, killing him.

According to law enforcement officials, Pfeffer then searched through Fitzgerald's pockets and tried to steal his service weapon, but couldn't get the gun out of the holster.

Prosecutors allege that Pfeffer then carjacked a vehicle nearby. He was arrested the next morning at his mother's Bucks County home.

During Fitzgerald's funeral service in February, he was posthumously promoted from officer to the rank of sergeant.

Pfeffer is charged with murder, criminal homicide of a law enforcement officer, disarming an officer, robbery, theft, evading arrest and weapons crimes in Fitzgerald's killing. He also faces robbery, theft, terroristic threatening and other charges in the subsequent carjacking. The Defender Association of Philadelphia declined comment on the charges Tuesday.

Dozens of Temple university police officers attended the hearing. The university has said Fitzgerald was the first Temple University officer killed in the line of duty. A father of five children, he joined the school's police force in October 2021.

"Being present is part of the battle here to ensure that the type of justice that this, you know, this monster deserves is enacted," Joel Fitzgerald -- a longtime member of law enforcement himself -- said. "It's important to our family, it's important to Philadelphia that justice is served here."

Family members standing outside the courtroom Tuesday said that they wanted to see Pfeffer sentenced to death if found guilty. Fitzgerald's father, a former Philadelphia police officer, said the case "meets every threshold of the death penalty."

“What we’d like to see is this person to go through the pain that our son went through, to go through the suffering that our family is going through,” he said.

The slain officer's widow, Marissa Fitzgerald, wearing her husband’s jacket, said she saw "no empathy, just an evil human being."

Even if Pfeffer is found guilty and sentenced to death, he won't necessarily be executed. Democratic Pennsylvania Gov. Josh [Shapiro said last year](#) that he won't sign any death warrants and called for the death penalty to be repealed.

The district attorney's office had no comment Tuesday about the pending trial. Pfeffer's formal arraignment is set for Feb. 13, according to online court records.

The Fitzgerald family has already [filed a lawsuit against Pfeffer](#), and his parents, accusing them of being liable for negligence and wrongful death.