

# Bellaire Police Officer Indicted in Tolan Shooting

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## News

A Bellaire police officer will go to trial over a new year's eve shooting.

A Harris County grand jury indicted Sgt. Jeffrey Cotton for shooting Bellaire resident Robert Tolan.

Cotton is charged with aggravated assault by a public servant. Laurie Johnson has more.

*Laurie Johnson*

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The shooting took place outside Robert Tolan's home. Bellaire police officers pulled Tolan over after they mistakenly identified him as driving a stolen car.

He was ordered onto the ground, while his family members tried to intervene.

The family says one officer pushed Tolan's mother against the house, causing Tolan to rise up in protest.

At that point, Sgt. Jeffrey Cotton fired multiple shots. One struck Tolan in the chest and traveled down, hitting his lung and liver.

Tolan's Attorney, Geoffrey Berg, says the indictment against Cotton is an indication of justice in Houston.

*"He will now be afforded the presumption of innocence that he did not provide Robbie Tolan and the Tolan family on December 31st of last year. We are going to assist the district attorney in any way we can and whatever way they request."*

The Tolan family maintains Bellaire police officers were swayed by racial profiling in their handling of this case.

Bellaire City Manager Bernie Satterwhite issued a statement in response to the indictment.

*"Neither any action nor statement by the grand jury or the district attorney's office has suggested, and the city has not learned of any evidence, indicating that the city's policies or lack of training played any role in the incident. All Bellaire police officers, including Sgt. Cotton, are trained and certified in accordance with Texas-mandated initial and continuing training requirements. There is nothing about the indictment or any investigation which even suggests that race played any role in the stop or Sgt. Cotton's actions when he arrived as a back-up officer."*



*From left to right: Tolan's Attorneys, Geoffrey Berg and George Gibson*

Harris County Assistant District Attorney Donna Hawkins says the case should go to court within the next few weeks.

*“The district clerk will receive the indictment in this case. At that time, a cause number and a felony district court will be assigned. Prosecutors from our district attorney’s Police Integrity Division will handle this case through its disposition.”*

The Tolans also plan to file a civil lawsuit against Bellaire P.D. Berg says the department could improve the situation by making an apology.

*“I think there’s a tremendous contrast between what happened in Dallas recently and what happened in Bellaire. The chief of the Dallas Police Department came out immediately and said he was sorry for what had happened and that was for an egregious situation in which a young man was prevented from being by his mother-in-law’s bedside as she lay dying. Robbie Tolan was shot. And we still have no apology so there is a great deal the Bellaire Police Department could do.”*

Bellaire officials have called the situation an unfortunate incident. Sgt. Cotton remains on paid administrative leave through the criminal trial process.

Laurie Johnson. KUHf-Houston Public Radio News.

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