

Attorney for Michael Brown's family criticizes handling of case at forum

13 HOURS AGO • BY MARGARET GILLERMAN MGILLERMAN@POST-DISPATCH.COM 314-340-8126

ST. LOUIS • The attorney for the family of Michael Brown said that enough corroborating witnesses had stepped forward for the county prosecutor to file charges against the Ferguson police officer who fatally shot the unarmed teenager.

“I’m very concerned the grand jury has been going on so long — it gives the impression that the case is complicated, and it’s not,” said Anthony Gray, the lawyer. “Six witnesses said Michael Brown had his hands up just before he was shot, and that’s sufficient probable cause to file charges.”

A grand jury is deciding whether to indict Officer Darren Wilson in the death of Brown.

Gray made his comments during and after a forum on race and diversity issues Wednesday night at the Missouri History Museum, presented by the not-for-profit, arts and speakers series Meet Me St. Louis. The discussion was co-sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League, Diversity Awareness Partnership and the National Conference for Community Justice.

Lisa Bloom, an author and NBC legal analyst, moderated the panel discussion, which also included Karen J. Aroesty, regional director of the Anti-Defamation League of Missouri and Southern Illinois; Raul A. Reyes, attorney and a New York-based television commentator; and Charlack Police Chief Steve Runge.

Bloom expressed concern that the Ferguson case appeared to be following a pattern similar to the one against the man who fatally

shot Trayvon Martin, an unarmed African-American teen in Florida.

No one at the forum spoke for the prosecution, and most in the audience seemed sympathetic to the protesters and to Brown. About 350 people attended, and more than 80 followed online.

Bloom said that when thousands of people wanted a prosecutor to resign, "it's time to recuse yourself." She was referring to St. Louis County Prosecutor Bob McCulloch, who also has defenders.

McCulloch's office is presenting evidence in the case to the grand jury.

"Why choose a system that is not only secretive but also glacially slow?" Bloom asked.

In other comments Gray said that he is "not anti-police...not anti-government" nor is the Brown family. Gray said he has been a U.S. Marine, a municipal prosecutor and municipal judge. He said this case was about "this officer related to this incident on this day."

Reyes, a lawyer and journalist in New York, said the issues of racial profiling, mass incarcerations and allegations of police brutality were not only a black issue. "This is (also) a Latino issue, an American issue," he said.

Runge said that since he took office in the past year, he was worked to improve police-community relations and race relations. To bring police closer to the community, he has eliminated the black cars with tinted windows and black uniforms his department had used, he said. He also has removed a car with a speed camera on Interstate 170.

Aroesty spoke about the importance of honest talk to improve race relations and fight prejudice. She said the situation "provides us with a spectacular opportunity" and urged more anti-bias training to combat racism.