

3RD STORE DEATH STIRS A SAD FURY LEGISLATION PLEDGED AFTER LATEST STRUGGLE INVOLVING A GUARD

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PRESS STAFF WRITERS. Staff writers Dennis Niemiec and Niraj Warikoo contributed to this report.

She strolled out of a Detroit drugstore Friday with a basketful of cheap cigars and hair products under her arm, making a casual exit as the store's alarm blared.

And now, for the **third** time in less than a year, a metro Detroit resident is dead after a scuffle with a security guard.

"This is becoming an epidemic," said the Rev. Horace Sheffield III. "It has gotten totally out of hand."

Alwanda Person-Jackson, 36, of Detroit was dead on arrival at St. John Hospital.

About 9 a .m. Friday, Person-Jackson browsed at the Rite Aid on Harper near Cadieux in northeast Detroit, police said. When her royal blue shopping basket was filled, she left through the door as the alarm sounded, police said.

A female security guard followed Person-Jackson to a van and tried to stop her from getting in. Seconds later, a male cashier came out to assist the guard, Detroit Homicide Inspector William Rice said.

Witnesses told police Person-Jackson put up a struggle but was dragged inside the store.

There, the struggle continued, with the store's male manager joining in, Rice said. The three Rite Aid employees subdued and handcuffed Person-Jackson. But she broke through the handcuffs and fought again, Rice said.

This time, a witness saw one of the employees -- the witness wasn't sure which one -- sit on Person-Jackson, who went limp, police said.

Store employees "tried to resuscitate her and then called EMS and police," Rice said.

Rice said a woman who accompanied Person-Jackson walked away. Police were trying to identify and locate her Friday.

Rite Aid closed for several hours after the **death**, and police cordoned off the store. They carried a blue basket out and loaded it into a police van. It was filled with items, including several red boxes of Swisher Sweets cigars and a Conair hair product.

Police said they did not know the cause of Person-Jackson's **death**. An autopsy is scheduled for today.

On Friday night, more than 25 stunned family members and friends gathered at the home of Person-Jackson's mother on Detroit's east side.

Her husband, Michael Jackson, said his wife had diabetes and had both knees operated on after being involved in a car accident in 1997.

"Some days, we had to carry her around on our back" because of the intense pain in her knees, Jackson said.

Jackson said he learned of his wife's **death** from media reports. He said he was shocked by reports accusing her of shoplifting.

"We didn't have financial problems," he said.

Person-Jackson attended Finney High School in Detroit and had two daughters, ages 20 and 13.

Her mother, Louvenia Banks, said police told her "they'll let us know what happened" after the autopsy.

Person-Jackson's **death** was expected to be cited by those pushing for better oversight and training of **store** security guards.

"It's just **sad**. It's awful," said state Sen. Philip Hoffman, R-Horton, who said he plans to introduce legislation this month. "What the victims did in all three cases was wrong.... But we need to be able to assure the public that despite the fact they commit a crime, they're not killed **as** they're brought to justice."

Rice said Person-Jackson's **death** has not been ruled a homicide. She could have died of natural causes, he said.

Sarah Datz, Rite Aid Corp.'s manager of public relations, said Friday that the company is investigating Person-Jackson's **death** before deciding whether to suspend or terminate anyone.

Although some Rite Aid **stores** contract with other firms for security guards, the guard involved in the Friday incident is employed by Rite Aid.

Michigan is among about a dozen states that do not license unarmed contract security guards. In other states, guards are required to undergo state-certified training.

Hoffman said he'll introduce a bill in the state Senate that would call for minimum training for security guards and make the State Police a watchdog of guards' behavior. State Rep. Hansen Clarke, D-Detroit, has also promised legislation.

On Friday, an outraged Clarke asked the State Police to grant emergency appropriation to implement minimum guidelines within the next 14 days.

"I'm totally appalled that people are being killed over merchandise," Clarke said Friday. "Merchandise is replaceable. A human life isn't."

Sheffield, an activist and a pastor with the New Galilee Baptist Church in Detroit, said he will hold hearings to gain grassroots support to push legislation through.

Sheffield has led protests over the previous **deaths**, suggesting race was a factor. The security guard and customer involved in Friday's **death** were black. The races of the manager and cashier were not immediately known.

Sheffield downplayed the influence of skin color in Person-Jackson's **death**.

"This has to do with the human race," he said. "We have a higher value of merchandise and products over life."

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Caption: Photo KIRTHMON F. DOZIER/Detroit Free Press; Map Detroit Free Press
Alwanda Person-Jackson died Friday.

Detroit police work outside the Rite Aid where a woman fought Friday with three **store** employees and died. The woman, Alwanda Person-Jackson of Detroit, was suspected of shoplifting.

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