

The Sper Family is mourning the loss of a beloved son, brother, and uncle. We know that Jonathan is in a better place -- a place where he no longer has to wrestle with mental illness. He was diagnosed with bipolar schizoaffective disorder, and over the last decade, he was actively trying to rehabilitate himself and manage his mental illness. Even while dealing with this disorder, he was a great friend to many people. He was a dreamer, full of life, and had a fierce entrepreneurial spirit.

In addition to the thoughts and prayers going out to our family, please keep in mind the officers who were involved in this tragic event. While serving our community and risking their lives every day, members of law enforcement must confront mental illness in its worst form. Although there are already tremendous efforts in this community to provide resources for the mentally ill, the Office of the Sheriff and the Sper family have a desire to advocate for continued improvement in how mentally ill people are handled by the criminal justice system and by community mental health providers so that this tragedy is not repeated. Through this advocacy, we hope to achieve a safer community for everyone, with a safety net for those living with mental illness, enabling them to live their lives in peace.

The need to thoroughly evaluate the incident and to work through the investigation is imperative. With that said, we would like to clarify some of the initial narrative. Jonathan was dropped off at his brother's house around 5:00 p.m. in a manic state. His brother did his best to confine Jonathan and to deescalate the situation with the intent of peacefully removing him from the property. After 2 hours, and a brief physical altercation, it was obvious that the brother needed assistance from law enforcement, at which point he called 911. The 911 operator was informed of Jonathan's manic state. When the police arrived, the two brothers were already separated. The officers were again informed of Jonathan's manic state from his brother. Jonathan was in the garage when the two officers arrived. Upon approaching Jonathan, the officers issued orders that were not followed. A struggle between the officers and Jonathan ensued which ended in Jonathan's death.

The Sper family asks for two things during this time of mourning -- peace and privacy from the media, and donations to be made to NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, so they can continue to support hundreds of thousands of families, advocate for better resources and tools for mental health providers, and lead awareness activities and events to encourage understanding and prevent situations like this from occurring in the future. A memorial fundraiser has been created for Jonathan Sper and can be found on NAMI's website, <http://ifundraise.nami.org/campaign/sper>