



Warren C. Evans
Sheriff

News Release

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Suspect in fentanyl overdose death of Riverview teen bound over on charges

◆ *Drug dealer is first Wayne County suspect to be linked to specific fatal OD*

An already convicted drug dealer from River Rouge soon may become the first person convicted in a Wayne County court in a fentanyl-related overdose death, Sheriff Warren C. Evans said today.

Late last week, Gregory Finley, a drug dealer from River Rouge, was bound over for trial on charges that he sold the fatal dose of fentanyl-laced heroin to Billy Joe Towle, 19, of Riverview, who died in the basement of his family's home on September 26, 2006, after injecting the drug he allegedly purchased from Finley. Towle died so quickly from the potent mix that when his father found him the needle was still in his arm, Evans said.

Evans said his narcotics investigators have worked tirelessly for more than a year to link Finley, who was known to them at the start of the investigation only as the street name "Snoop," to Towle's death. They have conducted countless interviews and combed through phone records and other evidence to first identify the person behind the name Snoop, then definitively link him to Towle on the day he died.

"This has been more than just an investigation for these officers," Evans said. "It has been a personal mission for them to bring a sense of peace and closure to Billy Joe's family, which has fought so hard to bring the person responsible for his death to justice."

Billy Joe's father, Bill Towle, Sr., has been a relentless advocate in the effort to find the person responsible for his son's death, Evans said, and his investigators have, at times, spoken with him on a daily basis.

After receiving initial information linking Finley to Towle, sheriff's deputies began making undercover drug purchases from Finley in early 2007. On April 10 of that year, narcotics officers, along with the Sheriff's Special Response Team (SRT) raided Finley's River Rouge apartment, where they found quantities of cocaine and heroin, but no fentanyl.

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Finley was convicted on the charges stemming from his most recent drug sales and sentenced to 20 years in prison. Based on Finley's own statements, along with phone records, statements made by others, and other key evidence, investigators became confident they had found the man who had sold Billy Joe Towle the hit of heroin and fentanyl that took his life.

After nearly a year of follow up investigation, the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office approved a "deliver of drugs causing death" warrant for Finley, which falls under the same state statute as homicide.

"We are very pleased that the court has determined there is enough evidence to proceed to trial," Evans said, "however, we will be satisfied only when Billy Joe's family is satisfied."

In June 2006, Sheriff's Deputies also arrested 45-year-old Daren Reese, who was believed to have been a major supplier of fentanyl to dealers working out of the Jeffries public housing project in Detroit. Using a coffee grinder, Reese had been mixing fentanyl with heroin in the basement of his apartment on Elijah McCoy near Trumbull in Detroit. When deputies arrested Reese, he had a vial containing 82 hits of fentanyl-laced heroin that had been packaged for street sale. It is believed that Reese was on his way to the Jeffries project to deliver the drugs to his street dealers at the time deputies arrested him. Reese also was convicted for his drug sales and is serving up to 20 years in State prison. He has not yet been linked to any specific victims.