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## Lawrence detective charged with intimidating witnesses

By Jill Harmacinski

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Deputy Chief Melix Bonilla and patrolman Richard Brooks at murder scene Friday morning.

Jim Patten

Staff Photographer



**LAWRENCE** — A 21-year police veteran is accused of threatening witnesses involved in the armed robbery case against Jamel Bonilla, 17, the son of Lawrence police Deputy Chief Melix Bonilla.

Yesterday, Brooks, 44, of Londonderry, N.H., was charged with two counts of intimidation of a witness and released on \$1,000 bail. No details of the alleged intimidation were made public and the police reports were ordered impounded.

"This alleged behavior is totally unacceptable, and does not reflect on the men and women of the Lawrence Police Department who strive every day to do their jobs the best way they possibly can," said District Attorney Jonathan Blodgett, whose office is handling the Jamel Bonilla case as well as the case against Brooks.

Brooks was one of 100 supporters in Lawrence District Court last Wednesday when a bail hearing was held for Jamel Bonilla, who was charged with armed robbery, assault, and firearms charges. Brooks' alleged offenses occurred that morning at the courthouse, authorities said.

When Brooks was arraigned yesterday, the detective tried to conceal his face under the hood of his Boston Red Sox sweatshirt.

Judge Thomas Brennan quickly ordered court officers to "take the hood off" and expose the police officer's face in the prisoners dock at Lawrence District Court.

Prosecutor Jennifer Kunsch asked Brennan to set bail at \$1,000, a request Brooks' lawyer, Murat Erkan, agreed to.

When asked to comment on the charges against Brooks, Blodgett said, "Nobody is above the law."

"And everybody has to respect the process that we have to live by in law enforcement," Blodgett said.

Erkan would not comment on his client's case, saying only, "We know that he'll be exonerated."

A half-dozen of Brooks' friends and relatives attended yesterday's arraignment. Brooks was arrested by state troopers yesterday morning after he met with Lawrence police Sgt. Emil DeFusco, who leads the department's internal affairs division.

Stripped of his handgun and badge, Brooks was booked at the Lawrence police station and taken to court for his arraignment late yesterday morning.

Erkan asked Brennan if Brooks could cover his face before appearing in the courtroom, saying there were "identification issues" in the case. But Brennan rebuffed him, saying he'd read the police report and there was no such issue.

Brennan also ordered Brooks to have no direct or indirect contact with the victims in the case. After posting bail, Brooks was released from custody early yesterday afternoon.

If convicted, Brooks faces a minimum of 21/2 years in jail on each count.

Brooks also was placed on paid administrative leave from the Police Department yesterday.

Others who attended Jamel Bonilla's bail hearing last week included Mayor William Lantigua, state Rep. Marcos Devers, fellow local police officers Gary Yancy and Elvin Alarcon, school safety officer Johnny Paredes, recycling coordinator Joel Chalas, along with dozens of other friends and relatives.

Lantigua later said he went to court to support Melix Bonilla, his longtime friend and campaign manager, but not to "show support for what his son is accused of."

Jamel Bonilla and two codefendants, Jonathan Vargas, 22, and Joseph Rodriguez, 18, were charged in connection with the Oct. 21 armed robbery of two men at 8 Caulkins Court. Bonilla is accused of wielding a silver handgun, a weapon Vargas allegedly used to strike one of the victims in the face before robbing him of \$46.

The incident occurred after a planned drug deal that day fell apart, a prosecutor said previously. The victims previously agreed to pay \$3,000 for 200 Percocet pills.

Authorities have yet to say where Jamel Bonilla got the handgun or who owns the weapon.

Brooks has been a political supporter of Lantigua. On Jan. 4, Brooks' daughter sang at Lantigua's inauguration.

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