

# Teen involved in bus brawl to file claim against Torrance

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Jamel Stanfield stepped out the back door of the Torrance Transit bus at a Carson stop to make sure his younger brother was boarding safely.

When Jamel returned moments later, the 13-year-old middle school student was confronted by the driver, who apparently thought he was trying to ride without paying.

A fistfight ensued and Carson sheriff deputies called to the scene arrested Jamel, who faces battery charges in Compton Juvenile Court. He is scheduled to appear on Tuesday. Jamel plans to file a claim against the city of Torrance on Monday.

But Mark Haushalter, his Redondo Beach-based criminal attorney, said he believes prosecutors would not have filed charges against Jamel if they had seen the footage of the March 5 incident, which was captured from an on-board security camera.

"The bus driver threw the first punch," Haushalter said. "You could see it by their shoulders."

Prosecutors were not able to respond to an inquiry by Friday.

Torrance city spokesman Michael Smith said he couldn't discuss the incident because it's a personnel matter, but said it was under investigation.

The driver, Robert Ward, 46, is on paid administrative leave pending the outcome, Smith said. Ward has worked for the department for eight years, according to the city.

"Torrance Transit has a very strong history of excellent customer service and safety, which is why video cameras are there - to look out for those on our buses," Smith said.

"This was an isolated incident and I hope nothing like this would occur in the future," Smith added.

Haushalter said his client, who he would not allow to be interviewed, was just being a "protective older brother" to 12-year-old Jai Stanfield when he got off the bus.

The video shows Jamel, wearing a gray sweat shirt with the hood over his head, boarding Line No. 3 just after 4 p.m. near Wilmington Middle School, where he attended classes.

On days that he is staying with his father in Torrance, like that day, he rides the bus through Carson, where Jai boards at Carson Street and Avalon Boulevard.

Jamel is seen riding for about 15 minutes, looking like a typical tired and bored teenager as he and the other passengers bump along.

He pulls the cord to notify the driver to stop and steps out the back door at 4:19 p.m. for about seven seconds. He makes a motion toward the front of the bus, then comes back in. He is joined by his brother and they sit down.

A minute or so later, the bus begins to move, then stops. The driver comes to the back and talks to Jamel. The driver motions toward the open back door, as if he is trying to get him to leave.

Jamel does, but the driver is seen pushing his back as he goes. Jamel immediately turns and gets back on the bus.

As the passengers on the crowded bus scatter, Jamel and the driver are lost in a blur of fast-moving fists and arms. The brawl lasts a few moments, and other passengers join in, and seem to be helping the driver push Jamel off the bus.

"I think it shocks the conscience that a 13-year-old is victimized by the very person who is supposed to take him home safely," Haushalter said.

The lawyer said he plans to give a copy of the tape to prosecutors at the next hearing.

Meanwhile, Jamel has hired a civil attorney, who said he plans to file a claim Monday against the city of Torrance.

John Nojima said the claim, which is a precursor to a lawsuit, will allege that the city negligently hired, trained and supervised the driver, that the driver assaulted Jamel and that the teenager was reasonably protecting himself at all times.

Nojima, a Torrance native, said he was "appalled" that a city employee would corner a teenage boy.