

Beat: News

Missouri governor warns against violence ahead of Ferguson decision

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USPA News - Missouri Governor Jay Nixon said Tuesday that hundreds of officers have received additional training and that the National Guard will be on standby to respond to any violence after a grand jury decides whether or not to indict a Ferguson police officer in the fatal shooting of an unarmed black teenager. Nixon, speaking at a press conference in Weldon Spring, emphasized that the government is committed to ensure that citizens are able to express their opinion, but warned that any violence will not be tolerated.

The shooting death of 18-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson in August led to days of rioting and a grand jury decision on whether to indict the officer who shot him is expected by the end of this month. "We have been working around the clock to prepare to keep the residents and businesses of the St. Louis region safe - regardless of the outcome of the parallel local and federal investigations," Nixon said. "Officers from the Missouri State Highway Patrol, St. Louis County Police, and St. Louis City Police will operate as a unified command to protect the public. The National Guard has been and will continue to be part of our contingency planning." The governor said emergency services were prepared to extend shifts and limit leave while the agencies involved have been provided with additional equipment to ensure efficient communication. He added that the National Guard, which was also deployed in August in an effort to end the street violence, would be on standby in case their assistance is needed to support local law enforcement. "These measures are not being taken because we are convinced that violence will occur, but because we have a responsibility to prepare for any contingency," Nixon explained. He added that more than 1,000 law enforcement officers had received a total of in excess of 5,000 hours of additional training to prepare for any unrest. "This coordinated effort will be guided by our core principles: keeping the public safe while allowing people to speak. This is America," Nixon said. "People have a right to express their views and grievances, but they do not have the right to put their fellow citizens or their property at risk." Chief Sam Dotson of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department added that officers are determined to protect and serve all citizens, including demonstrators. "While everyone is welcome to have their voices heard, putting the lives of other citizens or police officers at risk will not be tolerated," he warned. Captain Ron Johnson, the commander of Missouri State Highway Patrol Troop C, added: "Violence and destruction will not define us. Instead, it is the voice of change - which can be heard because of the First Amendment - that will define the true character of our region. We will protect the people's voice of change and ensure the safety of all." The city of Ferguson was the scene of days of rioting, often at night, after white police officer Darren Wilson shot and killed Michael Brown, an 18-year-old unarmed African-American teenager, on August 9. The shooting led to a nationwide debate on race relations and protests in Ferguson, which has a two-third African American majority among citizens but has a majority of white police and politicians.

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