

***Wanda Cooper Speaks out about the 2.23 Foundation, I Run with Maud, and Foundations using Ahmaud Arbery's Name without Permission, for Personal Agendas and Popularity.***

First, I would like to thank everyone for the support in the fight for justice for my son, Ahmaud Arbery, and the consistent outpouring of love you have shown my family. I am grateful for it all. There is nothing that is without value, from the smallest to greatest words, gestures, and contributions.

Ahmaud was more than a jogger murdered in Brunswick. He was my baby boy. I gave birth to Ahmaud on Mother's Day of 1994, at the age of 22. He was my third and last child. When Ahmaud was in Kindergarten I became a single mother, ceasing the relationship with his father. Being a single mother did not come without hardships but being a mother is one of the most rewarding titles I have ever had the pleasure of being called. When I made the decision to become a single mother, I also decided to never deprive my children of things they needed. I worked two jobs for 12 hours a day, for 15 years to provide for my children. I did this alone and I did not ask for or receive any help in raising Ahmaud.

It is with great disappointment that I must now elaborate on this situation with the founders of 2.23 and creators of I Run with Maud when I am still grieving, still advocating, still seeking justice, and still trying to adjust to the loss of Ahmaud. Before I ever made a statement, I spoke with them several times to do my best to resolve this situation privately.

I cannot in good conscience support a page that now appears more like a business opportunity for its staff rather than getting justice for my son. So, I want to shed some light on this so that I continue to prepare myself for the true fight of justice for Ahmaud, protecting his character, and being strong for my family.

1. ***The I RUN WITH MAUD social media page.*** I was asked to start this page by a friend of Ahmaud. I was appreciative for the page, at first, as it helped draw awareness and it was a memorial to Ahmaud. The social media was designed as memorial and that is what I agreed to. When the page began to transition to a business, my daughter and I addressed our concerns with the page administrators. They originally acknowledged the transition and stated it would be corrected, however, that never took place. I also asked to have access to the page as an administrator several times, and was ultimately denied any access, which began to alarm me.

2. ***The Trademark for I RUN WITH MAUD.*** I did not agree to the trademark nor was I asked to be a part of it. On May 9, 2020 a trademark application was filed. This was the day after Ahmaud's birthday; two days after the arrest of the McMichaels; and the date we set aside to release balloons in honor of Ahmaud, a very emotional time for us all. One of the trademark applicants had never even met my son, yet applied for this trademark in an attempt to profit off Ahmaud's name.

3. ***The GoFundMe.*** I did not ask anyone to make a GoFundMe, but was grateful for every contributor. The GoFundMe was suggested to me by one of Ahmaud's friends and I put my trust and faith into him that everything would be run appropriately. The campaign was established in early May, after Ahmaud was laid to rest. Ahmaud was covered under a life insurance policy that I struggled to pay for to prepare for days like these. I truly never thought I would have to use that policy or bury my son. Money cannot replace what I have lost and the fight for justice does not come without cost. I was not begging for money and I was prepared to fight for my son either way. I have always worked for what I wanted.

Since the passing of Ahmaud, I have returned to work because to work is all I know. To hear some people suggest that losing my son is a profit scheme is incredibly offensive to me and my family.

5. ***The Foundation 2.23.*** This foundation was established by Jason Vaughn, a local high school coach. He is not a relative and did not have a close relationship with my son. The ideas for the foundation likely started after national attention began to spread due to our advocacy efforts. Within seven days of the foundation's launch, its organizers had already planned a large fundraiser.

The I RUN FOR MAUD committee (all five members who I do not know well) have known for months I did not want my child's death to be exploited or used for monetary gain for anyone. I was disrespected and ignored.

I could not remain silent, I not only speak for myself, but most importantly I speak for my son. What is important to me is to gain justice for my son and find peace. I am so disappointed that I must address this issue. The truth is I buried my son and there is nothing about a trademark, a social media page, money, or control that will fix that. I now must protect my son's name.

The grief is a fight every day of my life. Fighting for justice is something I must do each day and every minute of the day. What I am experiencing is draining, but it is for my son. There is so much we experience after losses due to injustice. I am simply asking everyone to respect my wishes as they are always fair and in the best interest of my family and Ahmaud.

I thank everyone for their genuine support. It is needed and it keeps me going.

Wanda Cooper

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