

Beat: Miscellaneous

Missouri governor declares emergency ahead of Ferguson decision

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USPA News - Missouri Governor Jay Nixon declared a state of emergency Monday and activated the National Guard as authorities brace for possible unrest when a grand jury decides whether a Ferguson police officer will be charged in the fatal shooting of a black teenager. The decision to declare a state of emergency and to activate the Missouri National Guard comes amid increasing reports that some groups want to cause unrest if police officer Darren Wilson is not indicted.

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 Wilson is expected by the end of this month. "As part of our ongoing efforts to plan and be prepared for any contingency, it is necessary to have these resources in place in advance of any announcement of the grand jury's decision," Nixon said. "These additional resources will support law enforcement's efforts to maintain peace and protect those exercising their right to free speech." Nixon said the National Guard is well-suited to provide security at command posts, fire stations and other locations to allow law enforcement officers to focus on community policing, indicating that Guard members will not be used on the "front line" unless required. Instead, Guard members are expected to be used as a signal of support. The Guard will be commanded by Brigadier General Gregory Mason, who is a retired 30-year-old veteran of the Missouri State Highway Patrol. Nixon, in an executive order, added that he had directed the Missouri State Highway Patrol, the St. Louis County Police Department, and the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department to operate as a Unified Command to protect civil rights and to ensure public safety in Ferguson and the wider St. Louis region. "The United States Department of Justice and St. Louis County authorities could soon announce the findings of their independent criminal investigations," Nixon said in the executive order. "Regardless of the outcomes of the federal and state criminal investigations, there is the possibility of expanded unrest." Nixon, when speaking last week, 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. He said more than 1,000 law enforcement officers have received a total of in excess of 5,000 hours of additional training to prepare for any unrest, while the agencies involved have been provided with additional equipment to ensure efficient communication. 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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