Corey said she was seeking a middle ground that would get Fernandez out from the limitations of juvenile court, where there is no guarantee he could serve a continuous incarceration sentence until he is 22 if found guilty.

(AP) Political leaders, sport stars, entertainers and several thousand people have taken part in a rally in Miami to support the family of an unarmed Florida teenager shot and killed by a neighborhood watch volunteer.

Basketball stars Alonzo Mourning and Isaiah Thomas, singers Chaka Khan and Betty Wright, and others joined the parents of Trayvon Martin in calling for justice in the case.

Martin's father promised the crowd that he would not stop fighting “for my Trayvon and for your Trayvon."

The rally came a day after thousands marched through Sanford, the central Florida town where 28-year-old George Zimmerman shot and killed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in February. Zimmerman has claimed self-defense and has not been arrested.

Martin was Black. Zimmerman's father is white and mother is Hispanic.

State and federal authorities are investigating.

The special prosecutor leading the investigation into the shooting death of an unarmed Black teen by a neighborhood watch volunteer is known for her tough tactics aimed at locking up criminals for long sentences and making it difficult to negotiate light plea bargains.

Furthermore, 57-year-old Angela Corey has handled hundreds of homicide cases involving the justifiable use of deadly force -- experience that could prove invaluable. It will be up to Corey whether to charge 28-year-old George Zimmerman, the neighborhood watchman who says he was defending himself when he fatally shot 17-year-old Trayvon Martin during a scuffle. Martin was unarmed as he walked from a convenience store, and the case has become a racial flashpoint with protesters across the nation calling for his arrest. Zimmerman's father is white, his mother Hispanic.

Police did not initially charge Zimmerman because of a state law allowing someone to use deadly force if his life is in danger.

Corey, who also could call a grand jury to decide whether to file charges against Zimmerman, is known in legal circles as being passionate about victim's rights and having clubby ties to law enforcement. She won the State Attorney's Office seat after being fired from her job at the office a few years ago, beating the handpicked successor of the state attorney who fired her.

Corey was appointed the special prosecutor in the case by Gov. Rick Scott after State Attorney Norm Wolfinger, whose district covers Sanford, recused himself.

Since she took on the case a dozen days ago, Corey and her team of two prosecutors and an investigator have interviewed witnesses in Sanford and visited the scene of the shooting. She also has instituted a media blackout, refusing to comment on any aspect of the case as of this week. Corey refused to take any questions about the Trayvon Martin case during a telephone interview on Friday.

Defense attorneys who have gone up against Corey in court say she is up for the job.

“She is a tough-minded prosecutor who is prepared, thorough and a very good advocate for the prosecution in the court," said Ann Finnell, a Jacksonville defense attorney who has faced off against Corey during a trial. Finnell also was on the legal team for Casey Anthony, the Orlando mother acquitted of killing her 2-year-old daughter.

As a courtroom prosecutor, Corey was an aggressive advocate. When she ran for the State Attorney's Office in 2008, she made prosecuting juvenile criminals a top priority and celebrated her close ties to law enforcement agencies, so much so that in its endorsement of Corey's opponent, The Florida Times-Union newspaper in Jacksonville wrote: “Is Corey's relationship with the sheriff and the unions too close? Yes."

As the Jacksonville-based State Attorney for three northeast Florida counties, she has been known for filing more charges, bringing more cases to trial and being less likely to use a grand jury than her predecessor. Florida prosecutors are required to use grand juries only in first-degree murder degrees. But many prosecutors send high-profile or controversial cases to grand juries to avoid the political fallout of an unpopular decision.

“It would be fair to say that her office, when faced with the choice, files as many counts and charges as they believe they can prove ... which tends to make their prosecutions more complex and expose defendants to substantially more sentences," said A. Russell Smith, a Jacksonville defense attorney who is a past president of the Florida Association of Criminal Defense Attorneys. He attended law school with Corey and considers her a close friend.

“It also makes cases more difficult to negotiate. There are more charges and prosecutors are

less willing to drop counts in order to find a fair and negotiated plea."

Corey, a Jacksonville native, also teaches classes for prosecutors and police officers about interrogations and the justifiable use of deadly force and is active in the local Republican party.

But she does have her share of detractors, including her former boss and predecessor, former State Attorney Harry Shorstein.

Shorstein fired Corey in 2006 from the office she had worked in for the previous 25 years. He said the firing stemmed from a complaint from an intern who claimed Corey was unprofessional and profane. He asked Corey to respond to a professor who had brought the complaint to his attention, but Corey instead sent a letter criticizing the professor for communicating the complaint, according to Shorstein.

“I don't want to sound like an old, tough Marine, but if I'm your boss, and I order you to do something that is appropriate and legal, and you don't do it, one of us has to go," Shorstein said.

Corey disputed that account, saying she was fired because she would not agree to drop her run for State Attorney in 2008.

“They cooked up so many things, it was almost unbelievable," she said.

A job evaluation from 2006 provided by Corey said “Angela is one of the best" in reference to her litigation skills. It said she goes out of her way to help others but also warned her against giving the impression that police officers could appeal to her with any decision about which they were unhappy. The evaluation is signed by Shorstein.

Corey also has been criticized for bringing a case to a grand jury that indicted a 12-year-old boy for first-degree murder in the beating death of his 2-year-old half-brother instead of allowing it to

be handled in juvenile court. Protesters marched outside her office and delivered a petition with 180,000 names opposed to the decision.

Corey said she was seeking a middle ground that would get Fernandez out from the limitations of juvenile court, where there is no guarantee he could serve a continuous incarceration sentence until he is 22 if found guilty.

“If life in prison is inappropriate for a 12-year-old, but neither is juvenile, let's look for middle ground," she said.

Associated Press writers Christine Armario and Mike Schneider collaborated on this story.