

After string of shootings, Albuquerque Police Department purchases hundreds more assault rifles

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The Albuquerque Police Department (APD) has agreed to purchase at least 350 additional AR-15 assault rifles, the type of weapon used in the killing of James Boyd, a homeless man whose death sparked nationwide outrage.

The APD has killed 26 people since 2010, a significant number of whom were mentally disabled.

Albuquerque's KOB-TV local television station reported that the APD has contracted with a local vendor to purchase the rifles, at a cost of \$1,000 apiece, for a total cost of \$350,000. After the initial purchase of 350 assault rifles, the APD plans to order quantities of 50 as needed.

On March 16, APD officers used AR-15 rifles to shoot and kill mentally ill and homeless James Boyd in the city's foothills. The cold-blooded murder was captured by a video camera worn on the helmet of one of the shooters.

The AR-15, under its military designation of M16 and M4, is the standard-issue service rifle of the US military, and has seen combat in the occupations of Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and engagements in dozens of other countries. It fires rounds that are roughly three times more powerful than those of a 9mm pistol, and its automatic variant is capable of shooting at a rate of nearly 1,000 rounds per minute.

On April 10, the US Department of Justice (DOJ) said in a report that the APD had a "pattern and practice" of excessive force. It found that officers purchased highly upgraded assault rifles, including AR-15s, and regarded them as status symbols. Notably, the officers who shot Boyd were using suppressors and multiple optics on their rifles.

The police department responded to the complaint by

issuing AR-15 assault rifles to all officers licensed to carry rifles with them. Far from scaling back the militarization of the APD, the move will only further institutionalize police violence at public expense.

APD Union president Stephanie Lopez defended the purchase, saying, "I don't think it's militarizing the department." Stating that standard-issue handguns and shotguns were "insufficient," Lopez claimed, "There is a need to have these weapons on the street and within the department."

The purchase follows the June 27 filing of a lawsuit against the City of Albuquerque and the APD by the family of James Boyd. The 30-page "Complaint For Battery Resulting In Wrongful Death Under The New Mexico Tort Claims Act" alleges that the APD follows policies that "do not reflect the legal standards by which its officers need to abide to perform their jobs lawfully."

The complaint alleges that the APD recklessly deploys special units, such as the one that murdered James Boyd, "and, when deployed, those special units do not exercise meaningful control over scenes."

The complaint points out that APD officers routinely antagonize the mentally ill, escalating encounters, and "after creating a dangerous situation for all, officers deploy force, both lethal and not, unnecessarily. Invariably, City of Albuquerque and department leadership respond that the force was justified and the department does not suffer deficiencies in order to avoid civil liability. And the subject officers are not disciplined or retrained. The killing of James Boyd ... exemplifies every one of these failures."

The complaint elaborates on the grim aftermath of the shooting. James Boyd's last words were, "Please don't

hurt me,” and “I can’t move.” Emergency doctors performed a thoracotomy (opening of the chest) and multiple other surgeries. According to the report, Boyd “died at 2:55 a.m. on March 17, 2014, suffering an amputation of his arm and a slow and excruciating death.”

APD Chief of Police Gorden Eden’s statement five days later that the shooting was justified was exposed as fraudulent with the release of the helmet camera footage. According to the complaint, Eden “still has not come forth and said that [the shooting] was not” justified.

The DOJ noted that due to APD’s 2006 lowering of hiring standards, requirements for hires—including psychological and medical evaluations, polygraphs, and past terminations for infractions in other law enforcement agencies—were ignored. Both Keith Sandy, who fired the fatal shots, and Scott Weimerskirch, who sicced a police dog on Boyd, had records of violent and inappropriate behavior for which they were neither disciplined nor retrained.

Meanwhile, on July 1, yet another Albuquerque resident was fatally shot, this time by a deputy US Marshal working on a task force with other local law enforcement officers, while serving an arrest warrant. According to a July 8 report in the *Albuquerque Journal*, “Albuquerque Police and the Marshals Service still won’t answer questions about who the man was, whether he was armed or what charge he was wanted on. Neither has named the deputy marshal involved.”



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