

LAPD suppresses autopsy reports in police killings

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Los Angeles, California police officers shot unarmed 24-year-old Ezell Ford six times in the back on August 11, less than two weeks after the August 2 killing of Omar Abrego.

The killing of Ford, who had a history of mental illness, provoked demonstrations against police brutality in the city. Many have called for the prosecution of the officers involved, as well as a full public accounting of the circumstances of the shooting.

Abrego, 37, was pulled over and beaten to death by police officers after allegedly driving erratically in South-Central Los Angeles. The deaths of Ford and Abrego happened within blocks of each other and coincided with the military-police crackdown on protests in Ferguson, Missouri.

The autopsies of both Ford and Abrego have been placed on a “security hold” by the Los Angeles Police Department. LAPD Chief Charlie Beck has said that the release of the names of the officers who shot Ford and Abrego was delayed because of “security” concerns for the officers and their families.

Attorney Steven Lerman, who represented Rodney King during his police brutality trial and is now representing Ford’s family, told *Huffington Post* that the LAPD delayed the autopsy reports for “political reasons.” Lerman has described Ford’s shooting by LAPD officers as an “execution” and has reportedly retained a private pathologist to perform an independent autopsy.

In a provocative statement after Ford killing’s, the LAPD announced “it is unknown if the suspect has any gang affiliations.” Friends and family of Ezell Ford have defended his reputation, saying he was not even remotely affiliated with any gangs. The family’s attorney has announced plans to file a federal civil rights lawsuit against the LAPD.

Ford was apparently contacted by anti-gang police officers who performed an “investigative stop.” This is police jargon that acknowledges that the officers had no information that Ford had committed any crime.

The officers claim that Ford grabbed one of them and attempted to get an officer’s handgun from its holster. Witnesses told *KTLA News* a very different story. One witness told the news outlet, “They laid him out and for whatever reason, they shot him in the back, knowing mentally, he has complications. Every officer in this area, from the Newton Division, knows that—that this child has mental problems. The excessive force ... there was no purpose for it. The multiple shootings in the back while he's laying down? No. Then when the mom comes, they don't try to console her ... they pull the billy clubs out.”

Another eyewitness reportedly claimed Ford was already lying on the ground when they heard a police officer shout, “shoot him” before they unloaded three bullets into him. One eyewitness claims a video was taken of the shooting but was allegedly confiscated by LAPD.

Relatives of Ford told the media that he was diagnosed with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and depression. He was reportedly taking medication and was seeing a doctor.

On August 19, LAPD Chief Charlie Beck held a community meeting at the South LA Paradise Baptist Church to try to defuse the situation. Many in attendance held signs that read, “Justice for Ezell F.” and “Don’t shoot, let us live.” In his address to the angry crowd all Beck could say was, “Remember, this is equally hard on both sides.”

Hundreds of members of the community held a peaceful protest on August 21 outside the criminal court building in downtown Los Angeles, where Los

Angeles County District Attorney Jacki Lacey's office is located. The protestors demanded that charges against the officers be filed and had hoped to meet face to face with Lacey. However, her staff told demonstrators she was out of town and took a list of names and numbers of people whose family members have been killed by police. Family members were given cards with an email address where they could send their complaints.

Ford's body was laid to rest on August 30 at a church in southwest Los Angeles. Hundreds came to pay their respects, and a number of Democrats, preachers, and other members of the Los Angeles establishment were on hand to attempt to defuse the situation. The Reverend Cecil Murray told mourners that the LAPD had "improved" in the recent period, but "we still have a long way to go." This was said at a young man's funeral, after two unarmed people had been murdered by the LAPD in the last month.

As in Ferguson, the political establishment is afraid that protests over police killings like Ford's could get out of hand, and no effort was spared to try to rein in the protests and assert leadership over them. Representative Maxine Waters, a congressional Democrat, was one of the figures deployed. At the funeral, she announced that with Ford's death, "it is time for a national conversation." A number of black city councilmen—who preside over the city regime, including the LAPD—were also in attendance.



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