

Denver police shoot and kill sixteen-year-old girl

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In yet another police killing, Denver police shot 16-year-old Jessica Hernandez Monday while responding to reports of “suspicious activity” in a residential alleyway.

According to the parents of one of the teenagers with Hernandez at the time, who spoke to the *Denver Post* on condition of anonymity, the girl was sitting in the driver’s seat of a parked car listening to music with four of her friends at 6:30 in the morning in an alleyway behind a friend’s house in eastern Denver. They had spent the previous night hanging out together in a nearby park playing with a Ouija board.

Police say that the responding officer, later identified as Daniel Greene, determined that the car had been reported stolen and radioed for backup. Police then claim that Greene and a colleague, who arrived as backup and identified as Gabriel Jordan, “approached the vehicle on foot,” whereupon “the driver [Hernandez] drove the car into one of the officers.” They responded by shooting at the vehicle, firing several rounds into a car filled with minors and striking Hernandez several times, according to the preliminary autopsy report. Jordan was taken to a hospital and treated for a leg injury and released.

The police version of events was disputed by one of the car’s passengers who spoke with the media Tuesday on the condition of anonymity. She alleges that the police fired first, and that Hernandez lost control of the car after being shot in the neck. “They came from the back, speeding. Jessie tried to drive away,” she told local television station 9News. “They shot the window. When they walked up, they shot at her window and they shot her” at least four times, she said. She also says that they were unaware that the car had been stolen.

The car then crashed into a fence, and police pulled

Hernandez and the passengers out of the car with guns drawn. An eyewitness showed the *Denver Post* a video, which the newspaper has not released, of police handcuffing and searching Hernandez’s limp body, rolling her over back and forth on the pavement, before administering any first aid.

Friends, family and neighbors have expressed outrage over the killing. Hernandez’s mother, Laura Sonya Rosales Hernandez, is calling for an independent autopsy, declaring that she has no confidence in the official police investigation. Cynthia Valdez, a friend and classmate of Hernandez, told the media, “We’re angry about it. It’s another life taken by another cop. She was trying to find her talent. She wanted to find out what she wanted to be... Who knows what she could have been?”

Briana Diaz, the sister of one of the passengers, denounced the deliberately vague, anodyne initial description of the shooting by police. “They killed my friend like they were just dragging her and they’re trying to say it was a woman. That was a little ass girl that they just shot for no reason.” She also alleges that police threatened her when she tried to shoot a cell phone video of the incident.

Protesters held a demonstration outside the District Attorney’s office on Tuesday, led largely by church groups, demanding the appointment of a special prosecutor to investigate the case. Protesters expressed distrust of the DA’s office’s willingness to prosecute the case, citing the fact that no Denver police officer has faced charges in a shooting case since 1992.

This is the fourth time in the past seven months that Denver police have shot suspects in moving cars. Denver’s Independent Monitor’s Office, the official oversight agency for Denver Police, announced an investigation on Tuesday into the police department’s

policies regarding shooting into moving vehicles, which will concern itself only with whether they align “in comparison to national standards and best practices from other police departments in the United States.”

Police Chief Robert White was similarly noncommittal. “Based on what I know about the case, obviously there are a lot of questions that need to be answered,” he admitted at a press conference. However, he has declined to say whether or not the officers’ conduct was justified, citing the ongoing criminal and internal investigations.

The “impartiality” of such investigations was demonstrated last year when a Denver police officer was caught on camera beating a suspect and throwing his visibly pregnant girlfriend to the ground. The department then vigorously defended the actions of the officer, releasing a four-page statement titled “Accuracy Matters” accusing the local media of harming their “positive and trusting relationship with our community” and attacking claims by Levi Frasier, the eyewitness who shot the video, that the police attempted to delete the footage from his tablet. The police then later arrested Frasier on an outstanding traffic warrant and refused to allow him to post bail, while promoting the officer in question to the rank of sergeant.



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