

Los Angeles Police Commission cites minor protocol breaches in killing of Ezell Ford

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After stalling for ten months, the Los Angeles Police Commission issued a report Tuesday in the police killing of 25-year-old Ezell Ford.

In the presence of dozens of protesters, the Commission announced that one of the officers involved in the shooting, 13-year LAPD veteran Sharlton Wampler, used inappropriate tactics when approaching Ford. The other officer, Antonio Villegas, was completely exonerated of any wrongdoing despite the fact that he shot Ford as well. Neither officer yet faces criminal charges.

The Commission report for the first time lays out the officers' version of the shooting. Shortly after 8:00 p.m. on August 11, 2014, Wampler and Villegas saw Ford walking alone on the sidewalk. They notified the dispatcher that they were getting out of their car. The officers claim they intended to initiate a "consensual encounter," but when Ford did not stop to talk with them, Wampler reached out and grabbed the 24-year-old, mentally challenged man, who was engaged in no criminal conduct whatsoever.

According to the officers, a brief scuffle ensued, during which both officers shot Ford. They then notified dispatch—only 13 seconds after the first broadcast.

The officers justified the killing with the tired excuse that after grabbing Ford they thought he was reaching for Wampler's pistol, which was secured in a special retention holster. The Commission report does not challenge the glaring illogic of the officers' story—why would Ford try to grab an officer's gun when he was not doing anything illegal—nor the officers' decision to kill Ford instead of simply standing up and moving the gun out of his reach, where it never should have been in the first place.

As a result of the ruling, Wampler is to face

unspecified disciplinary action by Los Angeles Police Chief Charlie Beck. Wampler was the subject of a 2011 Civil Rights Complaint alleging that he held a man's head underwater in a front yard "kiddy pool," nearly drowning him in front of his parents and children.

The disciplinary actions will likely result in a slap on the wrist at best, as Beck has vigorously defended the Newton Division officers' actions since the incident and has also promised that the decision will do nothing to change overall department policy.

Shortly after the Police Commission's decision was revealed, Beck filmed a 76-second video that was distributed to the entire police force. In the video, Beck directly addresses his officers from a balcony at the LAPD downtown headquarters, declaring that the Police Commission decision "was a tough decision for them to make, and I know it's a difficult thing for you to think about as you go out and risk your lives every day protecting the city of Los Angeles."

Beck added, "you have my support, you have the support of the mayor, you have the support of the vast majority of the people of Los Angeles."

The ruling takes the claim that Ford reached for the LAPD officer's gun as an indisputable fact. The LAPD had previously cited DNA evidence on the officer's weapon holster as well as associated abrasions on the hands of both Ford and the officer. This evidence proves nothing, as the officers admit starting the fight by grabbing Ford as he was exercising his constitutional right to walk away from them. Given that he was hit by three bullets at extremely close quarters, one would not be surprised to find DNA on the holster. Regardless, none of this evidence has been publicly released and multiple witnesses testify that Ford was prone during the shooting and that there was no struggle for an officer's weapon.

Leroy Hill, a neighbor of Ford who witnessed the struggle, claims that the young man's shooting was preceded by a vicious beating by the officers. "I was sitting across the street when it happened. So as he was walking down the street, the police approached him, whatever was said I couldn't hear it, but the cops jumped out of the car and rushed him over here into this corner. They had him in the corner and were beating him, busted him up, for what reason I don't know, he didn't do nothing. The next I know I hear a 'pow!' while he's on the ground. They got the knee on him. And then I hear another 'pow!' No hesitation. And then I hear another 'pow!' Three times."

While the LAPD confiscated the sole video footage of the encounter, the witness accounts taken together corroborate that the shooting was a murder of an unarmed, mentally ill young man.

For this reason, the services of the five member Los Angeles Police Commission, touted as an example of civilian oversight over the third largest police department in the country, is being used as a mechanism to disregard any evidence supporting the guilt of the officers and whitewash the investigation.



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