

Man shot dead by Massachusetts state trooper was mentally ill, suicidal

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Santos Laboy, a 45-year-old man from Somerville MA was shot three times in the chest by a State Trooper on Friday June 19 after allegedly brandishing a folding knife which he refused to drop when confronted by the trooper.

There are contradictory reports of events immediately prior to the shooting, but it appears Laboy was being pursued by Boston University (BU) police who were searching for a man with outstanding warrants. They spotted Laboy at 2 p.m. and attempted to stop him. Laboy fled on foot through the Esplanade along the Charles River, pulling out a knife.

As he ran across a pedestrian footbridge, Laboy was confronted by a state trooper crossing the bridge from the other direction. Witnesses said they heard an exchange between the two, including the trooper telling Laboy to drop the knife, then at least three shots were fired and Laboy lay dead at 2:20 p.m.

According to the *Boston Globe*, an eyewitness to the shooting, Samantha Bourdeau, was riding in a car on Storrow Drive when she saw a man on the road, and “the next thing you knew, you look directly up and he’s on the bridge.” She said she saw police shoot him multiple times and heard at least three consecutive “booms” from the gunfire.

Another eyewitness, BU graduate student Chelsea Reid, said she saw a shirtless man running along the Esplanade and said several officers jumped out of a van and gave chase. The officers yelled, “Take him down! Take him down!” Reid said. “I’m shaken up. ... It’s just a lot,” the *Globe* reported.

The victim’s family members have condemned the killing as unnecessary. Laboy’s sister Olga Santiago told reporters she doesn’t understand why the officers couldn’t subdue him without killing him. Olga and her mother found out about the shooting when they

recognized Laboy’s gray gym bag on the news, causing her mother to have what doctors said was a minor heart attack. Another sister of Laboy, Rosa Santiago, said, “He needed help, he didn’t need to be dead. He was the type of person that was all to himself, he didn’t talk.”

Laboy was well known to police who said he had a “long and violent criminal history.” A posting on Laboy’s Facebook page reads, “I’m real close to turning into a savage. Only one chain link is holding me together.” Another reads, “Message to US Marshall, Boston Police and Probation ... Despite your threat to use force to capture me if I refuse to surrender, I’m still free and getting stronger by the day. Got nothing to lose...”

Laboy’s suicidal tendencies were known to police after a February 2009 incident in which he had wielded a three-foot samurai sword, smashing cars and police cruisers and begging officers to shoot him in the head. That incident ended peacefully as police held Laboy at bay until able to subdue him with a beanbag gun. Laboy faced 10 charges, including assault with a dangerous weapon and destruction of property worth over \$250 and was sentenced to five years in prison followed by three years probation after being convicted on five of the counts.

Laboy’s family has told reporters he was released from prison for the sword attack about one and a half years ago and had lived briefly in Somerville with Rosa Santiago before more recently living on the streets and in homeless shelters. Prior to going to prison for the sword attack, Laboy had spent roughly 20 years in prison after being convicted in a shooting that left a man paralyzed. His sister said Laboy attacked the man after being robbed.

Speaking outside of their mother’s apartment in the Mission Hill area of Boston, Laboy’s sisters Rosa and

Olga Santiago questioned the use of lethal force, stating that law enforcement were generally aware of Laboy's record of mental illness and suicidal tendencies. "They knew he was suicidal. They knew it. They didn't have to shoot him like the way they killed him, like a dog."

His sisters said Laboy showed signs of mental illness going back to a young age, but he never received treatment. They said that later Laboy refused offers of help or medication and remained angry. Olga Santiago said, "They killed my brother. You are supposed to figure out what the problem is first before you shoot, you don't shoot somebody without knowing their mental health problems."

Suffolk District Attorney Danial F. Conley has assigned Chief Trial Counsel John Pappas to lead a probe into the shooting, according to spokesman Jake Wark. "The preliminary investigation suggests that the man was armed with a knife, refused orders to drop it, approached the trooper, and was shot," Wark said.

Rosa Santiago claimed her brother was shot four times and multiple witnesses testify to hearing at least three shots. "He needed help. He didn't need to be dead. Our question is, you shoot somebody one time with a small knife? Why do you have to shoot him three more times? That's murder to us."

Laboy is the second member of their family to be killed by police. Their cousin, Nelson Santiago, 39, was fatally shot by Boston police officers in 2002. Conley's office found that police officers were justified in using deadly force when they shot and killed Santiago, claiming he "menaced police" in a stolen car on a dead-end Dorchester street.



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