

Baltimore police officer resigns after video of vicious assault sparks outrage

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On Saturday afternoon, a Baltimore police officer violently and without provocation assaulted Dashawn McGrier, a 26-year-old city resident.

A video of the incident shows officer Arthur Williams pushing McGrier against a wall, with his hand on his chest. In response, McGrier can be heard saying “So what, don’t touch me!” as he tried to move Williams’ hand away.

Williams then launched a vicious attack, landing multiple punches to McGrier’s face and tackling him to the ground, where he continues to punch McGrier in the face, before arresting him. At no time did McGrier attempt to fight back. Nonetheless, the officer threw at least 10 punches at McGrier’s face in about a 12-second span. No charges were filed against McGrier who had to be hospitalized, with X-rays taken of his jaw, nose and ribs for suspected fractures.

A second officer accompanying Williams did nothing to prevent his colleague from carrying out the completely unprovoked attack. The assaulting officer and McGrier are both African American.

In response to popular outrage over the video of the beating, the Baltimore police department announced Sunday that it had accepted Williams’ resignation and limited the second officer to administrative duties while it supposedly carries out an internal investigation. Even these incredibly mild reprimands are only due to the video evidence quickly emerging of the officers’ actions. It is highly likely that without the video no action would have been taken against either officer.

In June, according to McGrier’s attorney, the same officer had previously confronted McGrier without justification. The attorney, Warren Brown, told the *Baltimore Sun* “It seems like this officer had just decided that Dashawn was going to be his punching bag. And this was a brutal attack that was degrading

and demeaning to my client, to that community, and to the police department.”

According to a police statement, the Saturday incident began when the two officers encountered McGrier on the sidewalk. As Brown noted, the police had absolutely no probable cause to stop McGrier. According to the police, after initially releasing McGrier, the two officers again approached to give him a “citizen contact sheet.” Police issue such documents as an acknowledgment that a person has had an encounter with an officer. Brown said Williams told McGrier to stop without providing any reason. According to Brown, McGrier told the officer “What is this all about? You don’t even have probable cause.”

Despite the fact that Officer Williams already knew McGrier from the prior June incident, he then asked McGrier to provide identification. When McGrier refused, Williams quickly escalated the situation by pushing McGrier against the wall and then assaulting him.

Shantel Allen, who witnessed the assault, told the *Baltimore Sun*, “I was speechless. I was enraged. I was hurt. I was shocked more than anything. That is really something you don’t expect,” she said. “I truly feel as though this officer needs to be dealt with in a very serious manner, so none of his fellow officers or anyone else in the criminal justice system feels like they can use this kind of force. This is a crime. You can’t just go around putting your hands on people.”

Far from an anomaly, Saturday’s actions fit a long-pattern of police misconduct in Baltimore. In 2015, Freddie Gray was murdered by the police while being transported in their custody. In what is known as a “rough ride,” the police put the handcuffed Gray in the back of a police wagon and did not buckle him.

As a result of the criminally negligent police actions,

Gray suffered fatal spinal injuries. While criminal charges were brought by state prosecutors, all six officers responsible for Gray's death were either found not guilty or had all charges dropped.

In the wake of mass protests following Gray's death, the US Department of Justice (DOJ) undertook a review of the Baltimore police, which found widespread violations of constitutional rights by officers.

After examining police stops, arrests and court documents from 2010-2016, the DOJ found that Baltimore police officers routinely engaged in unjustified stops and searches, arrests without cause, racial profiling, use of excessive force, sexual discrimination, and retaliation against actions protected by the First Amendment, including detaining and arresting people simply because they used speech perceived to be critical or disrespectful towards the police.

In April 2017, a federal district court judge in Baltimore approved a consent decree between the Baltimore Police and the DOJ. Among other measures, the decree calls for restrictions on when and how officers can engage individuals and, in essence, spells out in detail the actions of police that fall within, and outside of, the bounds of the Constitution.

Officer Williams' actions against McGrier violated the consent decree in numerous ways. Of particular relevance to Saturday's incident, the decree provides that, in the event where there is no probable cause, officers can engage in either "voluntary contacts" or "field interviews" with Baltimore residents for the purpose of gathering information.

The consent decree explicitly states, however, that when such encounters occur, "the community member does not have to respond to questions and is free to leave ... Officers conducting a Field Interview shall ... [r]efrain from using words or actions that would tend to communicate that the person(s) are not free to leave or must answer questions ... During Field Interviews, officers who ask individuals to provide a physical form of identification, such as a driver's license, must inform the individuals that providing identification is voluntary."

Additionally, the consent decree states that "Officers engaged in, or attempting to engage in, a Voluntary Contact or Field Interview may not use a person's

failure to stop, failure to answer questions, decision to end the encounter, or attempt or decision to walk away to establish reasonable suspicion to justify an Investigatory Stop or Detention, Search, Citation, or Arrest of the person."

The police actions on Saturday expose the 2017 consent decree as an entirely toothless document which will not deter police from continuing their unconstitutional actions against Baltimore residents.

Earlier this year, in another notorious example of Baltimore police officers engaging in rampant illegality, eight members of a now-defunct elite Baltimore police task force either pleaded guilty or were found guilty at trial regarding crimes ranging from robbery and extortion to fabricating evidence. The officers were members of the Gun Trace Task Force, ostensibly set up in 2007 to focus on illegal gun possession in order to reduce the number of guns in the city.

Instead, the members of the group systematically violated the Constitutional rights of Baltimore's residents and used their authority to steal drugs and cash to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars. The leader of the taskforce, Wayne Jenkins, admitted in his plea bargain to providing cocaine and marijuana to an associate to resell on the streets and splitting the profits from the sales, netting himself between \$200,000 and \$250,000. Additionally, Jenkins admitted to stealing dirt bikes and reselling prescription drugs taken during the 2015 protests following Freddie Gray's murder.

In another indication of the corruption pervading the department, then-newly appointed Police Commissioner Darryl De Sousa resigned in May after being charged in US District Court with willfully failing to file his federal tax returns for 2013, 2014 and 2015.



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