

Tempe, Arizona police officer fatally shoots fleeing 14-year-old boy in the back

Kevin Martinez
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On January 14, 14-year-old Antonio Arce was shot in the back as he ran away from a Tempe, Arizona police officer down an alleyway. The boy later died at a hospital, fatally wounded by a bullet which struck in his rear shoulder-blade area. The shooter has been identified as Officer Joseph Jaen.

Police claim that Arce was carrying an airsoft gun and that he “turned toward the officer,” who then “perceived a threat and fired his weapon.” Body camera footage released by police shows Arce running away from the officer.

Jaen was responding to a 911 call about a suspected burglary in an alley in Tempe. The bodycam video shows Jaen pulling up to a pickup truck facing his squad car.

The officer then exits his car and crouches behind a trash can yelling, “Hey.” The officer, with his gun drawn, chases after the teen after he exited the passenger side of the truck and began running away down the alley.

The officer yells, “Let me see your hands” and fires two shots at the teen. Jaen then yells, “Shots fired, shots fired,” and later, “He’s got a handgun, he’s got a handgun.” The video inexplicably ends before the officer reaches Arce’s body.

Tempe Police Chief Sylvia Moir asked the public to withhold judgement until police completed their “investigation.” The purported gun which Arce was allegedly holding was a replica 1911 model airsoft gun.

The video shows Arce holding an object, but it is not clear whether it was the airsoft gun. Two witnesses, who have not been identified or released any statements, have since claimed that Arce was holding an item which looked like a gun.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the owner of the truck in the video, Lou Silvas, disputes the official police version of

events. Silvas told the *Arizona Republic* he was unloading items from his truck around 2:30 p.m. that Tuesday afternoon when he went inside his house and left his truck unlocked. He heard two shots outside and went to check his truck and look for his cellphone.

Silvas said he noticed his two airsoft guns were still in his truck and was later shocked to hear Police Chief Moir tell the media on Friday that Arce had stolen one of his airsoft guns from his truck before running. Silvas said there were only two airsoft guns in his truck and they had been undisturbed.

He believes the bodycam video shows Arce with a large, black cellphone in his hand, which was missing from his truck. In a police photo, the image of the object was freeze-framed and circled, with the caption, “appears to be a weapon.”

Silvas told the newspaper he thought about removing his airsoft guns from the car but noticed the empty police car parked in front of him. He then decided to wait for the officer, assuming he was being recorded the entire time.

He then reported being approached by a group of officers shortly after and was then placed in handcuffs in the back of a police car. Silvas asked what he had done wrong and was merely told it was just a “safety precaution.”

More than an hour later, Silvas was released but forced to wait outside his home while officers searched it. In an initial report, police mentioned a second suspect, but have since not mentioned this.

Silvas was asked by a detective the next day about the contents of his truck and mentioned the two airsoft guns. He then said the police impounded his truck and he would not be able to retrieve it until the following week.

Another resident of the home, Julie Ann Bravo, also

said police searched the home without permission or a search warrant. The home's occupants, including a 71-year-old woman, were ordered out of the house until 10 or 11 p.m., until the officers were done.

Bravo told media how she saw officers use a stun gun and handcuff Arce after the shooting. This would contradict Muir's press conference where she stated officers "rendered aid" to Arce within minutes of the shooting until firefighters arrived to take him to the hospital where he was pronounced dead.

Bravo claims to have recorded the incident on her tablet and allowed police to take it as part of their investigation. When they returned it, Bravo said it would no longer turn on and hasn't functioned since, despite it being only a day old.

The shooting had started with a 911 call from an anonymous man who reported being robbed in his home the week before. He told the operator that he was suspicious of anyone in the alley.

Silvas believed the caller was a neighbor who had a grudge against him and thought calling the police about his truck would give him a hard time. He told the *Republic*, "If he didn't call that 911 call, that young boy would still be alive today. But I would be out a cellphone — because that's all he took outside of my truck was a cellphone."

He added, "If they're announcing on the airwaves that (the airsoft gun) was taken from my vehicle, that's not true," Silvas said. "Because I had my two still there—and that's all I'm saying."

Arce's mother apologized to Silvas for the stolen phone to which he replied, "Look, I can replace the cellphone, but I can't replace a kid."

A protest was held on Thursday night with about 100 people gathered outside Tempe Police Department. Sandra Gonzalez, Antonio's mother, shouted, "They killed him," adding, "I want you to know the worst racists exist in Phoenix, Arizona. They treat us as criminals. I want justice. I need justice."

Jason Gonzalez also addressed the crowd demanding, "We want to see the bodycam footage. We want the autopsy and to do an autopsy by ourselves, without police." He told demonstrators how police would not let the family see Antonio's body or say in what exact circumstances he died.

As the demonstration continued, police officers threatened to arrest those who were blocking traffic on

the street. In order to avoid a potential assault by the police the protest organizers ordered an end to the demonstration around 8:20 p.m.

On Saturday, hundreds of people marched with Arce's surviving family in the same alleyway where he lost his life the week before. They released balloons and held banners with the words "Justice for Antonio."

Juan Arce, Antonio's father, spoke in Spanish with an English interpreter saying, "It doesn't matter if it was a child of 14-years-old or a person who is 50, there are many other ways to find solutions to things like this instead of murdering people."

Antonio's 18-year-old brother, Jason Gonzalez, also spoke at the vigil saying, "He ran because he was scared—my brother isn't a criminal, isn't a bad person." He was joined by 13-year-old Samantha Gomez, who befriended Arce in third grade at Scales Technology Academy. "He was such a good best friend, I miss him very much."



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