Retiring Chicago Police Chief Superintendent fired after video shows police body-slamming a mentally ill man

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On the afternoon of Thanksgiving Thursday, Bernard Kersh, a 29-year-old African American man with mental illness, was lifted off his feet by a Chicago police officer and slammed to the curb, his head bouncing off the pavement. Kersh lay motionless as another plainclothes officer circled their vehicle to stand over the victim. The incident was filmed by a witness on a smartphone video which quickly went viral online.

According to officers involved in the attack, they approached Kersh at a bus stop on the city's South Side for suspicion of drinking alcohol in public. Allegedly, Kersh became irritated and spat at an officer when he took away his bottle and proceeded to write him a ticket. The officer suddenly turned against him and used a martial art tactic, euphemistically called "an emergency takedown," to throw Kersh to the hard pavement with such excessive force that it could have been lethal. Kersh's attorney, Andrew M. Stroth, told local media, "He is lucky to be alive."

Kersh was initially taken to the University of Chicago hospital for treatment and after a few hours discharged, arrested, and taken to jail. He was charged with aggravated battery, resisting arrest, assault, and public drinking. Kersh suffers from schizophrenia and is blind in one eye, according to his attorney. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, he has prior convictions for interactions with police officers.

Democratic mayor Lori Lightfoot offered a standard prepared statement noting that the ensuing investigation "will be comprehensive and expedited so that the public may gain a complete picture." Shifting into damage control mode, she added, "While a single video does not depict the entirety of the interactions between the police and the individual, this particular video is very disturbing."

Tensions between working-class residents and the Chicago Police Department have been high after a number of high-profile killings and coverups, including the 2014 murder of Laquan McDonald. This latest incident has once again ignited the ire of frustrated citizens and caught the attention of most major news media.

At the end of October, President Donald Trump delivered one of his trademark fascistic speeches in Chicago before a crowd of assembled police officers at the annual convention of the International Association of Chiefs of Police. He suggested that police should use deadly force to wipe out crime and denounced the prosecution or even criticisms of the actions of police officers. Trump has previously counseled police not to be "too nice" to individuals in their custody.

The CPD officer who assaulted Kersh last week has been relieved of his duties pending investigation by the Civilian Office of Police Accountability. Meanwhile, the Chicago Police Union's President, Kevin Graham, defended the officer's actions in a statement made on Sunday, saying, "his actions were well within department use of force guidelines."

Not by chance but political necessity did longtime Democratic Party operative Reverend Jesse Jackson Sr. attend Kersh's Sunday bond hearing at the Leighton Criminal Courthouse, where the bond was set at $5000. Jackson posted the $500 bond on Monday for Kersh, stating, "He needs mental care. But the police had no basis for throwing him down in a way that could have killed him. We've seen this before, and it must stop. I hope that the Mayor and those involved will move

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immediately to deal with this police officer and those who stayed silent and did nothing."

Abruptly and unexpectedly, late Monday morning, Lightfoot announced that she had fired Chicago Police Superintendent Eddie Johnson, who was due to retire in a few weeks. Investigations into an October incident where Johnson was found sleeping in his car after admitting having had a couple of drinks seemed to have been the final stroke in a controversial tenure marked by police shootings, mishandled high-profile arrests and a legacy of civil rights violations and misconduct.

In a news conference, Lightfoot stated, "It has become clear that Mr. Johnson engaged in a series of actions that are intolerable for any leader in a position of trust, particularly the head of the Chicago Police Department. Mr. Johnson failed the hardworking members of the Chicago Police Department; he intentionally misled the people of Chicago, and he intentionally misled me."

Lightfoot did not provide further comments on the specifics behind the termination. Former Los Angeles Police department Chief Charlie Beck had been named as interim chief when Superintendent Johnson had announced his plan to retire last month.

According to LAPD Chief Michael Moore, "Beck is the ideal person to shepherd the Chicago Police Department through the next period. His vast experience with police reform, strategic approaches in reducing violent crime, and the ability to guide and inspire rank-and-file police officers will be invaluable as the Chicago Department searches for a permanent superintendent."

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