

Killeen, Texas police officer shot and killed unarmed man during mental health call

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Last Sunday, Killeen, Texas police officer Reynaldo Contreras killed Patrick Warren Sr., 52, who was suffering from mental illness, by shooting him multiple times in the front yard of Warren's home. Warren was described by his wife as a loving father and husband.

Warren was African American and Contreras is Hispanic.

Camera footage from a Ring doorbell and a cellphone show the officer leaving the house with Warren following after him, waving his arms and clearly unarmed. Before the deadly shooting, a man can be heard telling Warren, "Sit down!" After this and off camera, the "pop" of a taser being deployed can be heard, shortly followed by the sound of multiple pistol shots from Contreras' pistol. After this a man can be heard screaming, "No!" multiple times as other witnesses exclaimed in horror. Warren was transported to Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center where he later died.

A joint investigation by the Killeen Police Department and the Texas Rangers was announced on January 13. Contreras has been placed on administrative leave pending the results of the investigation.

According to Mapping Police Violence 2020, despite the pandemic, police in the US killed 1,127 people, surpassing the number killings in 2019 which stood at 1,096. Police in the US have consistently killed around 1,000 people a year. According to a study by the Treatment Advocacy Group, at least a quarter of police killings are of people suffering from acute mental illness at the time of their death.

Warren's family had called police to summon a mental health resource officer to their home to provide aid, but instead Contreras, an officer with no background in mental health crisis, was dispatched.

The family's lawyer, civil rights attorney Lee Merritt, said that the officer displayed a hostile demeanor and escalated the situation during the mental health check, at which point the family asked him to leave.

At a Thursday press conference, Merritt stated, "There's no reason that a mental health call like this should result in a fatality. Mr. Warren was not aggressive. Mr. Warren was not armed. He was in his home; he was on his lawn. He was within his rights to reject the services of law enforcement after they arrived. Their responsibility was simply to leave, or send the appropriate personnel to deal with this particular crisis. They failed this family in every way and left it shattered."

In a statement before a Thursday press conference, Warren's wife, Bobbie Warren, called for Contreras to be fired and arrested: "We expect Officer Reynaldo Contreras to be arrested immediately. There is more than enough probable cause for the Killeen Police Department, Texas Rangers or the Bell County District Attorney Henry Garza to issue a warrant for Contreras' immediate arrest and detainment - as would be expected for any other citizen under the circumstances."

Warren had recently lost his job at a plant in Belton, Texas which had closed because of the coronavirus pandemic, and had started a landscaping business in order to sustain his family. The stress of the loss of income and the associated social hardships and stress likely contributed to Warren's mental health issues.

Throughout Texas, jobs have been decimated by the pandemic. Workers in entire industries, including bars, restaurants, oil and gas, are struggling with massive layoffs. According to US Department of Labor Statistics and the Texas Workforce Commission

numbers, the Texas unemployment rate stood at 8.1 percent in November, more than double the 3.5 percent marked in 2019. Bell County, where Killeen is located, has a 7.5 percent unemployment rate.

The Texas government's criminal herd immunity policy, reopening schools and non-essential businesses, has served to exacerbate and prolong the health as well as unemployment crisis. The state provides little to no relief to workers and small businesses, with many workers struggling to receive unemployment due to the Texas Workforce Commissions confusing unemployment benefit process.



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