

Rochester, New York police pepper sprayed handcuffed nine-year-old girl

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Officers from the Rochester, New York police department were involved in a brutal assault which was recorded on their body cameras on Friday of last week. The victim of the attack was a nine-year-old African American girl who was handcuffed and subsequently pepper sprayed by police.

The mother of the child had called the police because of a domestic disturbance in the home, which precipitated the nine-year-old leaving the house. The footage shows the police capturing and bringing the girl back to the police car.

After a scuffle between the mother, police and child, another officer arrived to manhandle the child by pushing her down into the snow next to the patrol car. The officers that were on top of her then flipped her over while still on the ground and handcuffed her. There were several police cars dispatched to the scene, and none of the officers that were seen in the video were wearing masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

After being forcefully thrown into the back of a police car and tortured by two officers, and only seconds before officers attacked her with pepper spray as she called out for her father, in the body cam footage one officer says, “You’re acting like a child.” She responded, “I am a child.”

The use of pepper spray on minors could have long lasting negative effects according to a New York University Langone Health pediatrician Purvi S. Parikh who spoke with North Carolina Health News in November, “Any chemicals in your eyes, nose or lungs isn’t good, but it’s especially worrisome for kids because their organs are still developing. It has the potential of causing long-term effects.”

The officers involved in the attack were suspended with pay Monday, pending the conclusion of an internal

police investigation.

The comments of the police union president on the assault reveals the widespread attitude held by police in the US toward the working class. “Had they had to go and push further, and use more force, there’s a good chance she could have been hurt worse,” Rochester Police Locust Club president Michael Mazzeo noted, declaring that the police would have been justified in meting out an even more brutal beating. The union is named after the species of tree from which their truncheons were produced.

This latest attack follows the death of Daniel Prude at the hands of the Rochester Police Department this past March. Police had placed a plastic bag over Prude’s head while he lay naked on the freezing ground, suffocating him to death.

The RPD deployed police dogs, tear gas and pepper balls against peaceful protesters that were drawing attention to the police killing of Prude, George Floyd and others.

Rochester’s Democratic mayor, Lovely Warren, had fired Police Chief La’Ron Singletary in the face of the protests, and eventually replaced the interim chief, Mark Simmons, this past September with Cynthia Herriott-Sullivan, a longtime RPD employee. Warren and all three successive police officials are African American.

The Democratic Party-dominated Rochester city government responded to the community outcry against police brutality by creating a toothless Police Accountability Board (PAB). The body’s Executive Director, Conor Dwyer Reynolds, issued a statement on the pepper spraying of the child by police, which expressed its impotence: “While the PAB cannot conduct disciplinary hearings, we still have a legal duty to bring transparency to all of the RPD’s policies and

practices, including those at issue here.”

Mayor Warren had also implemented a new program after Prude’s death that was supposedly designed to reduce interaction between police and non-violent domestic disturbance. However, this did not protect the nine year old from the police. “Unfortunately, this was not an incident where the Person in Crisis (PIC) or Forensic Intervention Team (FIT) would have been called because of the type of the initial 911 call,” Warren said in a statement released Saturday.

Rochester stands out among the impoverished cities of upstate New York with 31.3 percent of the population living in poverty according to the US Census Bureau. The US poverty threshold for two adults and two children has been determined to be an unlivable \$26,200 per year.

Regardless of the reforms and cosmetic changes in leadership, the police continue to prove that they are loyal to the ruling class, protecting their property interests against the working class. The police in the US killed 1,127 people in 2020 according to the mappingpoliceviolence.org website. There have been over 1,000 people killed by police every year for the last five years. Tens of thousands are the victims of police brutality every year.



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