

Second day of Derek Chauvin trial: Witnesses to the police murder of George Floyd describe emotional experiences

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The trial of former Minneapolis, Minnesota police officer Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd resumed Tuesday morning after an interruption in Monday's live video feed forced Hennepin County Judge Peter Cahill to end the session earlier than scheduled.

Chauvin is charged with second-degree murder, second-degree manslaughter and third-degree murder after he pressed his knee into Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes as two other officers held him down. Chauvin faces up to 15 years in prison.

Floyd's death on May 25, 2020 sparked mass multiracial protests across the United States and on every continent, demanding justice and an end to police brutality. Video of his killing in broad daylight and in front of a crowd of witnesses went viral online, fueling the protests.

The proceedings are being followed closely throughout the US and internationally, with the full trial being livestreamed online by all the major news networks and online newspapers. Judge Cahill cited limitations due to COVID-19 in making the extraordinary decision to broadcast a trial for the first time in the state of Minnesota.

Donald Williams, a bystander who witnessed the officers pin Floyd against the pavement, resumed his testimony after it had been interrupted by a technical error Monday. Williams said after Floyd's limp body was loaded into an ambulance, he called 911 to report a crime—what Williams said was a murder committed by Chauvin and the other officers.

When asked why he called, Williams said, "Because I believe I witnessed a murder." He added, "I felt the need to call the police on the police."

Williams again told the court that Chauvin acknowledged him when he said Chauvin was using a "blood choke" on Floyd. On Monday, Williams, a trained mixed martial arts fighter, explained a blood choke is a form of strangulation that disrupts blood flow to the brain.

Minnesota Assistant Attorney General Matthew Frank showed Williams the infamous image of Chauvin pressing his knee into Floyd's neck. In the photo, Chauvin is looking up at the direction of the camera.

"This is what I saw," Williams told Frank. "The only reason why he's looking at me right now is because I told him it was a 'blood choke.'"

The witness described being concerned for his own safety and of those around him. He said he became emotional during the altercation because police were "nonresponsive" to the objections of himself and other bystanders.

Defense attorney Eric Nelson, who has argued that the scope of events are not relevant to the more than nine minutes Chauvin kneeled on Floyd, sought to portray Williams' perspective as limited. Nelson stated Williams had arrived at the scene after officers had already called for an ambulance and "stepped up" to a more urgent code.

Nelson declared that Williams had no knowledge of the 15 minutes officers interacted with Floyd before he walked over to the incident. Nelson added that Williams did not see the other two officers at the scene and could not hear what they were saying to each other.

Chauvin's attorney then attempted to blame witnesses for distracting officers and getting upset as they witnessed Floyd being choked to death. Nelson described Williams as growing angrier as he confronted the officers and quoted an FBI interview in which Williams told agents he "really wanted to beat the shit out of the police officers."

Williams admitted to telling that to federal agents but insisted that he was not angry because he felt the situation required him to practice "controlled professionalism." He grew frustrated with defense attorney because he focused on Williams' use of profanity towards the officers and asked Williams to confirm that he called Chauvin and Officer Tou Thao names, such as "tough guy," a "real man," "bogus" and "a bum." Williams insisted that he maintained his composure, "I stayed in my body. You can't paint me out to be angry."

The next witness was 18-year-old Darnella Frazier, who was not shown on camera because she was a minor when she witnessed what happened between Floyd and officers. Frazier was one of many bystanders who recorded what occurred last May. Her footage is the video which initially went viral on social media.

Frazier told the court she was on the way to the Cup Foods convenience store with her nine-year-old cousin when she saw an officer kneeling on a man. After she saw this, Frazier ushered her cousin inside the store.

She explained that she has stayed up some nights "apologizing and apologizing to George Floyd for not doing more and not

physically interacting and not saving his life.” Frazier added that Chauvin was the one who had the ability to save Floyd’s life and should have.

When prosecutor Jerry Blackwell asked Frazier about the character of the crowd, she said she did not think they were unruly. She stated no one threatened the officers or became violent with them. Frazier said the only violence she witnessed came from police officers at the scene. She described feeling threatened when Chauvin repeatedly reached for his mace as others tried to move closer to help Floyd.

Frazier’s young cousin also testified Tuesday morning off camera. “I saw an officer put the knee on the neck of George Floyd,” she said, referring to Chauvin. “The ambulance had to push him off of him. ... They had some guys take him off of him.”

When prosecutor Jerry Blackwell asked the girl how she felt about what she saw, she said she was “sad and kind of mad” because she felt as if Chauvin was stopping Floyd’s breathing and hurting him.

Alyssa Funari, who recorded three videos of the encounter with her friend’s phone, also took the stand. Funari told prosecutor Erin Eldridge she stopped to record the incident because what was happening seemed serious. She said Floyd looked like he was fighting to breathe, and knew he would not live if officers continued to pin him down.

Funari stated she saw Chauvin staring at Floyd while he kneeled on him. “I saw him put more and more weight on him. I saw his leg lift off the ground, and his hands go in his pocket,” she said.

Eldridge played for the court a video Funari took where she can be heard calling out to Chauvin, “Why are you kneeling him more?” and “He’s about to knock out.” When asked to explain the statement, Funari said she could see Floyd go unconscious as his eyes rolled to the back of his head.

Nelson attempted to discredit Funari’s recollection, pointing out she told prosecutors that she did not see officers check for Floyd’s pulse but initially told investigators at the scene she had seen officers check for a pulse multiple times. Nelson asked the witness if she was angry, in another attempt to suggest bystanders distracted officers.

Funari said that she was angry but added she did not distract or try to attack officers. “I was upset because there was nothing we could do except watch them take a life in front of our eyes.”

Her friend, a 17-year-old high school student, told the court she arrived with Funari as bystanders were already asking officers to lift Floyd from the pavement. She also said she heard Floyd struggling to breathe and calling out for his mother.

“You could tell he was talking with, like, small—smaller and smaller breaths, and he would spit a little when he would talk, and he would try and move his head to—because he was uncomfortable,” she said.

The final witness called Tuesday was Genevieve Hansen, 27, a Minneapolis firefighter with EMT certifications. Hansen said she approached the scene because she saw flashing lights and heard people yelling.

“I was concerned to see a handcuffed man, who was not moving, with officers with their whole body weight on his back and a crowd that was stressed out,” she said.

Hansen said that she recognized Chauvin from a call she responded to the previous day. As Hansen approached, she recalled that Chauvin “seemed very comfortable with his weight on Mr. Floyd” and had his hand in his pocket.

Hansen said that she was immediately concerned for Floyd because he was not moving, and his face looked swollen. She testified that she could tell Floyd was not conscious because he was not responding to painful stimuli, such as having a knee pressed into his neck. She was not on duty but immediately identified herself as a firefighter because she thought Floyd needed medical attention.

In a video played for the court, Hansen is heard begging officers to check Floyd’s pulse. She insisted that she was trained to give medical assistance, but officers did not let her intervene at the scene.

“There was a man being killed,” Hansen testified. “I would have been able to provide medical attention to the best of my abilities, and this human was denied that right.”

In a recording of a 911 call Hansen made following the incident, she said, “I literally watched police officers not take a pulse and not do anything to save a man.”

While under cross-examination, Nelson asked Hansen if the crowd of bystanders was “angry” and “upset,” expanding on his earlier narrative that the crowd was threatening to officers. Hansen became visibly upset and replied, “I don’t know if you’ve seen anybody be killed, but it’s upsetting.”

Nelson tried to poke holes in her testimony, drawing on her own experience as a firefighter to suggest that she should have assumed that police had already called for medical assistance because it was protocol. He also scrutinized Hansen’s statement that she gave to investigators after Floyd’s death, leading to an argument breaking out between the pair.

Judge Cahill excused the jury and told Hansen she must answer questions directed at her without arguing with Nelson. Cahill told Hansen to return Wednesday morning, when the trial will continue.



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