

Evidence grows against former Minneapolis officer Derek Chauvin on day four of murder trial

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Further testimony and new evidence presented this week in the trial of former Minneapolis, Minnesota police officer Derek Chauvin further implicate him and his partners in the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020.

New video consisting of security and body camera footage played Wednesday showed what happened between Floyd and officers prior to bystanders arriving. Within seconds of approaching the vehicle Floyd was in, former officer Thomas Lane drew a gun on Floyd and demanded he exit the vehicle.

Floyd, in a panicked state, immediately apologized and told officers that he did not know what was going on. Floyd pleaded for Lane not to shoot him as Lane removed him from the vehicle, handcuffed him, and placed him on the ground. Floyd did not struggle but expressed his discomfort and confusion.

When officers attempted to put Floyd in the back of their police vehicle, Floyd pleaded for officers to speak with him about the situation, telling them that he was scared and claustrophobic. As he was being forced into the car, Floyd said he had a hard time breathing because he had previously been infected by COVID-19. Before Chauvin arrived and pinned him to the ground with his knee, Floyd told officers that he was not trying to run but wanted to get on the ground.

The videos refute the argument that Floyd was aggressive towards officers or was a “tough guy” that had to be taken down, in Chauvin’s words. Officers quickly and immediately escalated the situation and made no attempt to lower tensions or help Floyd, who was visibly distressed.

Thursday’s most damning testimony came from Chauvin’s own supervising officer. Retired

Minneapolis Police Sergeant David Pleoger testified that the officers’ use of force against Floyd should have stopped as soon as he stopped resisting.

When asked when use of force against Floyd should have ended, Pleoger said, “When Mr. Floyd was no longer offering up any resistance to the officers, they could have ended their restraint.”

Prosecutor Steve Schleicher asked Pleoger if that moment was when Floyd was handcuffed and on the ground. “Yes,” Pleoger replied.

Pleoger also testified that officers did not give him a proper explanation of what transpired when he arrived on the scene. Chauvin did not immediately tell Pleoger he pressed his knee into Floyd’s neck. When Chauvin did disclose the information, he did not say for how long.

When cross-examining Pleoger, defense attorney Eric Nelson built on his argument that officers were concerned about bystanders. Chauvin’s defense has argued that the atmosphere created by agitated witnesses “distracted” officers from properly caring for Floyd. However, when asked by defense attorney Nelson whether it was more important to deal with the “immediate threat” or a medical emergency, Pleoger stated he would address both simultaneously.

A significant element of the defense’s strategy is attempting to vilify Floyd, focusing on the controlled substances found in his blood when he died. Courteney Ross, Floyd’s girlfriend since August 2017, recounted Thursday how she and Floyd struggled with an opioid addiction triggered by chronic pain—something which millions of American workers are tragically familiar.

“Both Floyd and I, our story is a classic story of how we both got addicted to opioids,” she testified. “We got

addicted and tried really hard to break that addiction many times.”

Both Floyd and Ross had prescriptions and became addicted and began buying them from others who were prescribed opioids for pain when theirs ran out. Ross explained that they were able to kick the addiction on and off, but she believed Floyd had begun using again in May 2020. While Ross was cross-examined, Chauvin’s defense attorney Nelson contended Floyd died because of drug use.

Second to testify Thursday was EMS paramedic Seth Bravinder, who described his efforts to resuscitate Floyd after he arrived in an ambulance. Floyd was in full cardiac arrest when paramedics arrived and never developed a pulse. Bravinder stated how urgent medical care was needed during full cardiac arrest.

“Basically, just because your heart isn't doing anything at that moment, it's not pumping blood. It's not a good sign for a good outcome,” he said.

Defense attorney Nelson questioned Bravinder about the crowd and asked if it influenced the decision to move Floyd to a different location. Bravinder agreed that the crowd was responsible for the decision but later explained it is imperative to get a patient into the ambulance with the medical equipment.

Hennepin EMS paramedic Derek Smith, Bravinder’s partner, testified he checked Floyd's pulse while three officers continued to pin him to the pavement, and he did not detect one.

“I looked to my partner, I told him ‘I think he's dead, and I want to move this out of here and begin care in the back,’” Smith said, noting the agitated crowd of bystanders. “In a living person, there should be a pulse there. I did not feel one. I suspected this patient to be dead.”

Minneapolis Fire Captain Jeremy Norton testified that when he entered the ambulance Floyd was in, he saw “an unresponsive body on a cot.” Norton had been called to the scene and initially arrived at the Cup Foods convenience store near where Floyd was pinned to the ground before meeting up with Bravinder and Smith. After following the ambulance to the hospital, Norton said he felt the need to file a report with his supervisors.

“I was aware that a man had been killed in police custody, and I wanted to notify my supervisors to notify the appropriate people above us in the city, in the

fire department and whomever else, and then I also wanted to inform my deputy that there was an off-duty firefighter, who was a witness at the scene,” he added.



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