

# Democratic representative Val Demings justifies police killing of Ma'Khia Bryant

Trévon Austin  
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US Representative Val Demings, Democrat from Florida and former chief of the Orlando Police Department, said the officer who fatally shot 16-year-old Ma'Khia Bryant last week in Columbus, Ohio responded as he was trained to do. In an interview with CBS's "Face the Nation" on Sunday, Demings recalled her 27 years as a cop, saying her time as police chief informed her perspective on the killing.

Demings, an African American congresswoman who was vetted in 2020 as a potential Vice President for Joe Biden, echoed an argument often used to defend officers that use excessive force, stating police do not have the benefit of hindsight and must make split-second decisions.

"Everybody has the benefit of slowing the video down and seizing the perfect moment. The officer on the street does not have that ability. He or she has to make those split-second decisions and they're tough," Demings said.

"But the limited information that I know in viewing the video, it appears that the officer responded as he was trained to do with the main thought of preventing a tragedy and a loss of life of the person who was about to be assaulted."

Demings was asked what she would say to police who believe they are being unfairly judged because of an increased focus on accountability. Demings said that when she speaks with officers, she reminds them to use compassion and remember their training.

"The overwhelming majority of law enforcement officers in this nation are good people who go to work every day to protect those, protect and serve our communities. I remind them of that. Always stand on the right side, speak up and be professional and do the job that you're paid to do," she said.

Bryant, who was black, was shot four times by white

Columbus police officer Nicholas Reardon last week, minutes before former police officer Derek Chauvin was found guilty in the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In a video of the incident released by police, Bryant appears to be swinging a knife at another individual before Reardon fatally shoots her. Hazel Bryant, Ma'Khia's aunt, told the *Dispatch* that her niece got into an altercation with someone else at the foster home she lived at.

Franklin County, where Bryant was killed, has one of the highest rates of police killings in America. From 2015 to 2020, police in the county killed 38 people, according to an analysis by The OHIO Alliance for Population Health. An average of 4.81 per million people were killed in Franklin County, the 18th highest rate of fatal police shootings in America's 100 most populous counties. Columbus is the deadliest city in Ohio for police killings in the recent period, with 35 recorded fatalities since 2015.

Demings comments contain a grim truth: Reardon was following his training when he killed Bryant. Rather than being trained as peacekeepers that uphold "the sanctity of life," police are groomed to shoot first and ask questions later. This is doubly true for Reardon, who is an active-duty US Air National Guardsman trained as an expert marksman.

Chicago police officer Eric Stillman, who fatally shot 13-year-old Adam Toledo last month, also served in the US military. Before he became a police officer, Stillman joined the US Marines. His service included a deployment to Afghanistan. Stillman's attorney, Tim Grace, has also claimed that his client was following his training when he shot Toledo and consequently would not face criminal charges.

With the recent Chauvin conviction as a rare exception, the police are granted impunity to beat and

kill. The police kill an average of 1,000 people every year in the US—claiming victims of every race and ethnicity—with the rate continuing at three deaths every day so far in 2021.

In Elizabeth City, North Carolina, authorities declared a state of emergency Monday as the local sheriff's office is expected to release body camera footage from the killing of Andrew Brown Jr., a 42-year-old black man, last Wednesday in his driveway.

“It seems likely that the video and audio footage will be released in the very near future. In order to ensure the safety of our citizens and their property, City officials realize there may be a potential period of unrest within the City following the public release of the footage,” a city proclamation read.

City police also announced road closures surrounding the county courthouse and sheriff's office, stating the streets were “closed for citizens exercising their constitutional right to a peaceful protest.”

According to the Pasquotank County Sheriff's office, Brown was fatally shot by deputies after they attempted to serve him with an arrest warrant for drug-related charges.

An eyewitness said deputies fired at Brown when he tried to drive away, and a car police removed from the scene had multiple bullet holes and its back windshield shattered. Since then, peaceful protests throughout the city of 18,000 residents have called for officials to release the police body camera video of the shooting. Seven sheriff's deputies involved in the shooting have been placed on administrative leave.

Attorneys for the Brown family viewed body camera footage Monday and said deputies shot Brown in the back of the head when he had his hands on his steering wheel. Attorney Chantel Cherry-Lassiter said Brown was not a threat to officers as he tried to back out of his driveway and described the killing as an “execution.”

“There was no time in the 20 seconds that we saw where he was threatening the officers in any kind of way,” she said at a news conference.

Lassiter said deputies were already shooting and shouting “let me see your hands” when the short clip started. She said she counted as many as eight deputies in the footage, some wearing tactical uniforms and some in plainclothes, all armed with rifles and handguns.

Attorney Harry Daniels stated the video shows deputies shot Brown while he was sitting in his car in his driveway and drove away after officers started shooting at him. When asked if Brown was shot in the back, Daniels said he was shot in the back of the head.

The family's lawyers told reporters Pasquotank County Attorney R. Michael Cox treated them rudely and criticized his decision to only share 20 seconds of video from a single body camera. Brown's family has demanded the county released all footage related to the killing.



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