

Notes on police violence

Family demands release of full video of Milwaukee, Wisconsin police killing

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The family of Roberto Zielinski, who was shot and killed by Milwaukee, Wisconsin police officers on May 30, has demanded that the Milwaukee Police Department (MPD) release unedited body cam footage of the incident.

The Milwaukee police went to Zielinski's residence after 911 calls reported that a man had been randomly firing shots. One caller warned police that Zielinski was apparently suicidal, telling the dispatcher "He's legit trying to be suicidal, so if they come up on him, he's probably gonna shoot."

In the account of the incident released by the MPD, which includes edited body cam footage, officers can be seen crouched behind nearby parked cars in front of Zielinski's house, shouting at him to drop his gun and surrender. Two more gunshots are heard before Zielinski moves to the rear of the house, with the officers following.

The police continued to try to talk Zielinski down for several more minutes, and different officers can be heard saying that he was alternately holding the gun to his own head and pointing it at them. Finally, an officer can be heard to say that Zielinski was aiming his gun at them, and another shoots and kills him.

Russell Ainsworth, an attorney for the family, challenged the official account of the shooting at a press conference and has called on the police to release the full and unedited body cam footage.

"The Milwaukee Police Department says that it is releasing a video of the shooting for transparency purposes but releases a video that is doctored and edited to push their narrative. That is not transparent, that is not accountability, and that is not justice."

Ainsworth told the press that Zielinski himself had

called 911 not long before the shooting. He also said that the unedited footage would show that he was asking for help immediately before being shot and that he had asked police to contact his sister, who is a Milwaukee police officer.

The officer who shot Zielinski has been placed on administrative leave pending an investigation.

Salt Lake City, Utah

Last week, additional footage of the August 23, 2019 police killing of Michael Chad Breinholt while in custody in West Valley City, Utah, a suburb of Salt Lake City, came to light. The footage was compiled by the *Salt Lake City Tribune* and the PBS program Frontline.

The new recordings first show the police officers' initial encounter with Breinholt, who had shown up at his girlfriend's workplace drunk and claiming that he had taken "8 or 9 pills." Though Breinholt is clearly intoxicated—a field breathalyzer test showed he had a blood alcohol level three times the legal limit—he was not belligerent or menacing.

The footage also shows the police interviewing Breinholt's girlfriend, who told the officers that "he wants to commit suicide" and that he told her he "took all those pills so that he would die."

The police then search Breinholt and arrest him for suspicion of driving under the influence. Once he is brought into custody, he is held in a processing area for several hours. Footage from that time shows the officers taunting the clearly intoxicated Breinholt, who is sobbing and partially incoherent.

At one point, the handcuffed Breinholt falls to the floor and the officers leave him there for eleven minutes until paramedics with the fire department show

up to check his vital signs and then leave.

The police continue to threaten Breinholt, telling him he is going to be charged with felony DUI. Breinholt asks to be taken to “Uni,” the local psychiatric hospital, to which the police respond, “maybe after you go to jail.”

A short time later, Breinholt stands up from his chair and claims to “have a gun in my pants.” The gathered officers laugh at this and one of them asks, “Do you have a gun in your shoe too?” The drunken Breinholt tells the officers “There’s a gun in my shoe, there’s a gun in my seat,” which he repeats several times.

One of the officers then pulls the handcuffed Breinholt to his feet. As Breinholt struggles against them, one of them shouts, “he has my gun.” The footage is unclear, but it appeared that Breinholt, who still has his hands cuffed behind his back, had touched the handle of the officer’s gun, which remained holstered throughout the incident.

The footage then shows a third officer, Sgt. Tyler Longman pull his gun and point it at Breinholt’s head. With one officer holding Breinholt’s arms and another holding him by the back of the neck Longman shouts “you’re about to die my friend.” He then shot Breinholt in the head at point blank range, killing him on the spot.

Sgt. Longman was not charged in the shooting and returned to active duty. He had shot and killed suspects on two previous occasions in 2007 and 2008.

Jackson County, Florida

In Florida last week, former Jackson County sheriff’s deputy Zachary Wester was sentenced to twelve years in prison on charges related to planting drugs on scores of motorists he had pulled over on minor traffic violations. Jackson County is a mostly rural, agricultural area in the state’s panhandle, 60 miles northwest of Tallahassee.

Wester would often claim that he smelled marijuana after he pulled over one his victims and ask for their permission to search their vehicle. Believing they had nothing to hide, most motorists agreed to the search.

Wester would then produce either marijuana or methamphetamine that he kept on hand and claim that he found it during his search.

Wester first came under suspicion when a local prosecutor took note of the fact that he was responsible for an unusually large amount of drug arrests in the

small rural county.

Upon investigation, it was discovered that Wester would turn his body camera on and off during the traffic stops in a suspicious manner. A search of his arrest reports also showed that a larger number of those arrested by Wester protested their innocence at the scene.

The case was eventually taken up by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, who arrested Wester after searching his car and finding multiple bags of marijuana and methamphetamine.

Wester’s arrest led to at least eight people being released from custody and another 120 pending cases being dropped.



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