

*Star Tribune* hails decision as the “right call”

## No charges for Minneapolis police officer who killed Amir Locke during no-knock raid

**Matt Rigel**  
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Hennepin County Attorney Mike Freeman announced Wednesday that the City of Minneapolis, Minnesota, would not be filing charges against Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) officer Mark Hanneman for the fatal shooting of 22-year-old Amir Locke during a no-knock raid in February. The announcement comes after the conclusion of a weeks-long internal investigation by the Minneapolis Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) which was sent to the Hennepin County Attorney’s office on March 29.

In the announcement, Freeman appeared with Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison, a leading member of the state Democratic Party whose office took over the prosecution of Kim Potter for the killing of Daunte Wright last year in the Minneapolis suburb of Brooklyn Center following growing protests in both cities. Potter was convicted of manslaughter in February and sentenced to two years in prison.

The details of Locke’s killing and the conduct of the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) and city government in its aftermath point to a clear effort at a cover-up and subsequent whitewash.

On the early morning of February 2, Locke was killed by Hanneman in less than 10 seconds after Minneapolis police initiated the no-knock raid. Raids were conducted on several units of a residential building in Downtown Minneapolis. Locke, who was not wanted for any suspected crime, happened to be sleeping on the couch of a family member’s unit which was forcibly entered by several MPD officers. He was immediately shot as he was startled from his sleep, and died shortly after.

The shooting immediately resulted in outcry once Locke’s family was notified, and the response of the MPD and the Minneapolis city government was to justify the shooting and smear and vilify Locke.

The MPD’s initial statement released in the afternoon of the day of the shooting claimed Locke was a “suspect” in a homicide investigation four times. The statement also claimed that “Officers gained entry to the target apartment on the seventh floor, loudly and repeatedly announced their presence... crossed the threshold of the apartment, and advanced with continued loud announcements of their presence.”

A photo of Locke’s legally owned gun was included in the initial press release along with a statement claiming he was encountered “armed with a handgun pointed in the direction of officers,” in a further attempt to vilify the victim.

Virtually all of the claims the MPD made about Locke and the details of the situation, including the forced entry without announcing their presence and Locke’s activity prior to being shot, were demonstrated to be false when body camera footage from the raid was released the following day.

MPD Chief Amelia Huffman and Minneapolis Democratic Mayor Jacob Frey held a press conference to damage control the release of the body camera footage when Attorney Nekima Levy-Armstrong, Frey’s democratic opponent in the 2020 Minneapolis mayoral election who jointly held the meeting with Frey and Huffman, interrupted Huffman’s attempt to dodge questions on the inconsistencies.

Also left out of the information released immediately following the shooting were that the raids were elevated to a search warrant by the MPD and the warrant itself was not an arrest warrant but a warrant to collect evidence. This raises the question of why a SWAT raid was conducted in the first place.

Neither the Minneapolis BCA nor Freeman specified whether they had taken circumstances into account, nor

was any comment made by Freeman or Ellison about the conduct of the MPD and city during their joint appearance. The only concession to the family was the empty declaration that Locke's killing was "tragedy."

Immediately following the announcement that there would be no charges, the local press rushed to justify the decision. The *Minneapolis Star Tribune* editorial board quickly released a statement Wednesday afternoon declaring the clearing of Hanneman "the right call." The statement continues, "That decision is entirely appropriate and serves to further reinforce the principle that in the American system of justice the law is to be applied impartially in line with the facts." This statement flies in the face of reality, when the facts were immediately distorted by both the city and the MPD in their crude attempt at a character assassination.

This type of conduct is not limited to the murder of Locke, but it is routinely employed by the police such as the case of Winston Smith, who was killed by the US Marshal Service in June 2021 in Minneapolis, and Breonna Taylor, who was killed in her house in Louisville, Kentucky, by police officers as they burst in her front door late at night in March 2020.

Notably, Ellison praised Mayor Frey's reaction to anger over Locke's murder by placing a limited restriction on no-knock raids, despite his election campaign promise to ban them as soon as he was elected. The editors of the *Star Tribune* praised Ellison and Frey for the requirement that police wait 20 seconds after announcing their arrival, which, given the failure of MPD officers to announce themselves in the raid which resulted in Locke's death, will likely not be followed.

The announcement of the decision not to charge Hanneman has sparked anger from the community and Locke's family. Locke's mother, Karen Wells, spoke at a press conference in New York following the announcement: "I am not disappointed. I am disgusted with the city of Minneapolis. The spirit of my baby is going to haunt you for the rest of your life."

Protests are planned for this weekend in front of the Minneapolis Government Center and across the city.



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