

County sheriff shoots and kills 66-year-old white woman in rural Wyndham Township, Ohio

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The Garrettsville Police Department released bodycam video on Tuesday that captures a Portage County sheriff's deputy shooting and killing 66-year-old Cora Baughman in the garage of her neighbor's house on May 14.

The killing of Baughman, who was shot multiple times in the chest and twice in the leg according to a preliminary county coroner's report, took place in Wyndham Township, a rural community located between Cleveland and Youngstown, Ohio.

The police video begins at around 9:30 a.m. as a Garrettsville officer arrives at the house, which has a large front yard and a long driveway. The sheriff's deputy is already out of his cruiser and walking toward the house when he spots Baughman just inside the neighbor's garage. He says, "Come out here, let me see your hands now. Come here."

Baughman can be seen stepping outside the garage with her hands up. The deputy then yells, "Drop it now. Drop what's in your hand. Drop what's in your hand now," as both officers advance toward the house. With his handgun drawn and aimed at Baughman, the deputy then starts running toward the garage and yells, "Ma'am drop it. You will be shot."

Baughman can be heard saying something, although it is not clear what she says, as she turns and then goes back into the garage, walking between two parked vehicles. The deputy sheriff follows her and continues yelling "Drop it now." Although the actual shooting is not visible in the video, 15 shots can then be heard fired in quick succession and the deputy yelling "Shots fired, shots fired, drop it!" Baughman, who is seen on the ground, can be heard saying, "I don't have it."

The deputy then proceeds to put handcuffs on

Baughman as she is lying face down in a pool of her own blood.

A Facebook post on May 14 from Portage County Sheriff Bruce Zuchowski said that "shots were fired" without saying who discharged their weapon. The report also said, "One subject was transported to UH Portage Medical Center where they were later pronounced deceased."

According to a transcript of two 911 calls that morning from the neighbor, Richard Knerem, Baughman had entered his garage and was trying to open a door into his house, and she had pointed a gun at him. Knerem said during the emergency call that he had not been communicating with Baughman and that the two had been in a dispute over her septic tank dumping into his yard.

Aside from the original brief statement, which did not mention that the deputy fired his weapon or Cora Baughman by name, the Portage County Sheriff's Office has not commented on the incident or responded to requests from news media for comment. The Garrettsville police bodycam video and the coroner's report were released after requests from the *Akron Beacon Journal*. The sheriff's office will not be releasing any bodycam footage because Portage County does not require the officers to wear cameras.

According to *The Portager*, an abbreviated copy of the sheriff's incident report said Baughman was charged with aggravated burglary due to trespassing with intent to "inflict harm." While the full report has not been released, Baughman's two victims are listed as Richard and Barbara Knerem and a named witness is an apparent relative of Baughman's, 31-year-old Aaron Baughman.

The Ohio Bureau of Investigation (OBCI) is investigating the fatal shooting at the request of the Portage County sheriff, and news reports have said the inquiry could take months to conclude. The OBCI confirmed on Tuesday that Baughman was the woman killed in the incident, and when it concludes its investigation it will hand the findings over to the Portage County Prosecutor's Office.

The killing of Baughman, a white woman who lived in a trailer next to the Knerems on a dirt road, exposes the reality that the victims of police violence and murder are from all racial groups and geographic locations in the US.

According to a study by The Marshall Project, a nonprofit news organization that exposes the brutality and injustice of the US criminal justice system, published last August, fatal police shootings in rural American communities are happening at unprecedented rates but are given very little media attention.

Among the significant findings of The Marshall Project report, titled "Shooting first and asking questions later," are that officers in rural areas fatally shot 1,200 people between 2015 and 2020 and that "rural incidents mirrored many of the dynamics of police shootings that have come under scrutiny in cities."

Rural police killings "seldom attract attention from the public or the national press. Police shootings in isolated areas are rarely captured on video, and many rural officers don't wear body cameras."

In some states, such as Kentucky, Pennsylvania and Texas, state troopers are responsible for many deaths in rural areas. In Kentucky, state troopers shot and killed 41 people between 2015 and 2020, and 33 of the victims were from rural areas.

The Marshall Project says that notable among the rural shootings is that those being killed are mostly white and male. "White people make up the rural majority in nearly every state, and two-thirds of the people fatally shot by law enforcement in rural areas across the country were white, the data analysis shows; about 10% were black. (In cities, 37 percent were black and 31 percent white.)"

Similarities among police shootings in all communities in the US include that two-thirds of victims are armed and a majority have drug addiction or mental health issues, including some that are "in the

throes of crises." According to The Marshall Project, in Kentucky, many of the police shootings "occurred in the state's poorer counties."



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