

Handcuffed Georgia woman dies in police custody after ‘falling’ out of moving squad car

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Outraged family members and social media users are demanding justice for Brianna Marie Grier, a resident of Sparta, Georgia, who died on July 21 after suffering massive head injuries while in police custody six days prior.

Police initially claimed the 28-year-old mother of twins “kicked” police and the door of the moving squad car before leaping to her death after being arrested.

The partial release of body camera footage this past Friday has proven that narrative to be a lie and prompted police to conjure a new narrative of the circumstances that lead to her death.

Before the footage was released on July 27, Hancock County Sheriff Tomlyn Primus sent 90 pages of reports to CBS 13 WMAZ referencing over a dozen contacts the police had had with Grier, in an attempt to justify their violence.

Speaking to reporters following her death, Grier’s parents, Mary and Marvin Grier, acknowledged that they had called emergency services multiple times in the past when their daughter was having a crisis. Brianna Grier was previously diagnosed with schizophrenia and was taking medication at the time of her death, according to her parents. They said they called police to take her to a mental health facility because she was outside their home knocking on the door and making loud noises.

In an interview with the *Washington Post*, Marvin Grier said that his daughter was staying with them on July 14 and visiting her daughters, who live with their grandparents.

Through their attorney, Benjamin Crump, the family has insisted that in previous instances when emergency

services were dispatched to assist with Brianna, an ambulance, along with the police, would arrive to help. However, this was not the case on July 15 when the Griers called the police after midnight.

While details are still murky, it appears that after Hancock County Sheriff Lt. Marlin Primus and Deputy Timothy Legette arrived at the Grier residence shortly before 1 a.m., they decided to place Grier under arrest for public drunkenness after accusing her of smelling of alcohol. It also appears the police were planning to cite the diagnosed schizophrenic for “resisting arrest” before she was fatally injured.

The body camera footage released Friday by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation begins with Grier, already in handcuffs, on the ground and unarmed, telling police she had not been drinking and asking them to give her a breathalyzer test.

Ignoring her pleas, the two cops begin to manhandle Grier, who cries out in distress, “Get off me! Get off me! I ain’t broke no law.” The footage shows police carrying the handcuffed Grier by her hands and feet to the cruiser before dropping her on the ground near the cruiser.

As the police start to grab at Grier, who is lying on the ground, she begins sobbing, telling the police, “I bet I hang myself as soon as I get in there. There is more than one way to kill yourself.”

The senior officer on the scene, Primus, becomes visibly annoyed at having to deal with Grier. The footage shows him taking out his taser, activating it and saying, “I know how to get her up.”

Grier responds, “You can tase me. I don’t care.”

Primus decides to put the taser away, and instead he and Legette quickly pick up Grier, toss her into the

back of the police cruiser and slam the door. Neither cop checks on Grier to make sure she has not been injured after being thrown, with her hands cuffed, into the back of the cruiser.

After closing the door, Primus asks, “You got the other side closed?” to which Legette responds, “Yeah.”

The body camera footage that has been released is from the perspective only of Legette. While it does not appear that Primus was wearing a body camera, no dash camera footage from either police cruiser was released.

The footage that is shown does not indicate that either cop went to the other side of the police cruiser to ensure that the door was closed. Neither cop appears to check on Grier or attempt to put a seat belt on her, which, given her handcuffs, she would have had a very difficult time doing on her own.

After police loiter outside the car for a few minutes, Legette gets in his cruiser and begins driving without saying a word to, or checking on, Brianna. After a few minutes of driving, Legette stops the car. His body camera shows Brianna outside the car with her face down on the side of the road.

Legette informs his dispatcher that they need an ambulance, while he pats Brianna on the side. Primus, who has been driving behind Legette, walks up, notices she is still breathing, and remarks, “She’s getting up... She’s fine... She’s breathing.”

Brianna Grier, however, was not “fine.” She suffered two major head injuries, leaving her in a coma for several days before she passed away at around 1 p.m. last Thursday at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta.

Grier joins the legions of workers, retirees, teenagers and children who have been killed by police while suffering a mental health crisis. An ongoing database maintained by the *Washington Post* on police shootings between January 1, 2015, and July 29, 2022, reports that 1,618 of the 7,607 people shot and killed by police in that period were suffering from a mental health illness, or about 21 percent.

However, Grier was not shot, and unlike many of those who are killed by the cops, she was not in possession of anything that could be considered a weapon. The body camera footage released on Friday confirms that Grier never posed a threat to the police and that she was handcuffed before she was thrown into the back of an apparently open police cruiser.

In a statement accompanying the release of the

footage, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation acknowledged, “Agents have concluded that the rear passenger side door of the patrol car, near where Grier was sitting, was never closed.”

The statement also said, “GBI agents concluded that Grier was placed in the back seat of the patrol car, handcuffed in the front of her body with no seatbelt.”

Speaking to the *Post* this past Friday, Marvin Grier said that in retrospect, “If we had known it was going to end up this way, we would have let her stay here.”

Attorney Crump and others in the orbit of the Democratic Party have presented Grier’s death at the indifferent hands of the police as another example proving that police killings in the US are a manifestation of racism.

This ignores the fact that one of the two officers directly involved in Grier’s death, Primus, is himself an African American man.

Furthermore, while African Americans, especially poor and working class, constitute a disproportionate percentage of victims of police killings, a 2015 study by the Treatment Advocacy Center found that people suffering from a mental health crisis were 16 times more likely to be killed by police, a far more deadly relationship.

By presenting the issue of police violence as one of race and not class, the Democratic Party and its supporters cover up the role of the police as front-line enforcers of the capitalist state, whose function is to suppress the working class in the interests of corporate profit. At the same time, they work to sow divisions in the working class.

Meanwhile, Biden and the Democrats have put aside their talk of police “reform” in favor of massive increases in funding for police departments across the country.



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