

Los Angeles police begin new year killing three people in just over 24 hours

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In just over 24 hours between January 2 and January 3, 2023, police officers with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) were involved in three separate “use of force” incidents that left three men dead. No police were injured in any of the incidents, and none of the men killed by police was armed with a gun.

The frequency of the killings, coupled with the violent actions of officers, forced LAPD Chief Michel Moore to release selectively edited body camera footage on Wednesday in an attempt to tamp down rising popular anger at the unending wave of police violence in the country’s second largest city and across the United States.

While it is the policy of the LAPD to release body camera footage within 45 days, the police decided to release the footage just as Moore was giving his first public press conference on the incidents on Wednesday.

In each deadly encounter, the police are shown refusing to employ, or even discuss bringing in, social workers or mental health units to assist, even though in each incident the eventual victims exhibited clear signs of mental distress.

One of the men killed by police was Keenan Anderson, a 31- year-old teacher and father. Anderson encountered police after he was involved in a traffic accident in Los Angeles on January 3. In the body camera footage released by the LAPD, it begins with Anderson jogging towards a motorcycle cop and motioning to him where the accident had taken place.

The cop, following Anderson’s direction, arrives at the scene of the accident. As the cop arrives, the other people involved in the accident tell him that Anderson was one of the drivers involved in the incident.

The cop immediately turns around and sees that Anderson is in the crosswalk and tells him to go sit on the sidewalk. Anderson complies, but, in an obvious indication of mental distress, tells the cop that “somebody is trying to kill me.”

While the next part of the footage is edited, the tape that was released shows Anderson repeatedly apologizing to and being extremely cooperative with the police.

In the edited footage, which covers a span of roughly eight minutes, Anderson remained on his knees or sitting on his rear, with his hands either behind his back, on top of his head or in front of him, talking with police. At no point does Anderson brandish a weapon or threaten the police.

After roughly eight minutes, Anderson appears to become more agitated and eventually stands up and tells the cop he needs to get some water. He continues to exhibit signs of mental distress, telling the police,

“Somebody’s got to see me, sir,” while at the same time beginning to walk away from the police.

Even as he begins to walk and eventually, run away from the police, Anderson kept his hands raised with his palms open.

The video shows that at least three police officers, one on a motorcycle, quickly giving chase and apprehending Anderson within 30 seconds of him walking/running away from the scene of the accident. As soon as the motorcycle cop catches up to Anderson, he yells at him to “get down on the ground now!” which Anderson did, putting his hands behind his head, while saying, “Yes, sir, yes, sir.”

As one cop continued to yell at Anderson to “turn over” on his stomach, two other cops arrived, each one grabbing Anderson by the arm. Within five seconds, all three cops grabbed Anderson and forced him onto the pavement.

The tape shows Anderson screaming in distress as the police wrestled him down, “Help, help, they are trying to kill me!”

As the police continued to grapple with him, at various points twisting his arms while applying pressure to his neck and chest with their knees and elbows, Anderson yells, “These are actors!”

In response to Anderson’s cries, one of the cops threatens Anderson that he is going to “tase him” if he continues to “resist.” At this time there are three police pinning Anderson down, including an African American officer, who is at various points observed using his elbow to apply pressure to Anderson’s throat, causing him to choke and yell, “They’re trying to George Floyd me.”

As the police continue to wrestle and suffocate him, Anderson pleads, “Please, please.”

One cop responds, “All right, I’m a, I’m a tase him.”

In less than a minute Anderson was tased by the one cop at least four times, for roughly 33 seconds. The first time the cop deployed the taser he shot the metal prongs at Anderson, sending 50,000 volts through the wires and into his skin. The cop then pressed the taser directly against Anderson’s back, to the left of his spinal column, roughly where his heart would be located.

The cop held the trigger while pressing the taser against Anderson’s back for approximately 12 seconds, sending painful electric shocks into the screaming man.

As the other police continued to apply pressure on Anderson's neck and back, the one cop continued to tase him. After the initially tasing Anderson for 12 seconds, the cop zapped Anderson again for nine seconds, and then again for six more seconds, and again for six more seconds. Each time the cop tased Anderson, he was already on the ground, or on his stomach with his hands behind his back. As he was being tased, Anderson yelled, "Help me!" and "I am not resisting!"

With roughly five people surrounding and on top of him, Anderson was handcuffed and his legs hogtied. According to police, after a few minutes the fire department and ambulances arrived, and Anderson was placed in a wheelchair before being transported to a local hospital.

According to police, roughly four hours after Anderson was tased, choked and hogtied, he suffered a cardiac arrest while at the hospital and died. In an attempt to blame Anderson for his own death at the hands of the police, the cops claim that a toxicology test run by the LAPD's Forensic Science Division Toxicology Unit on blood samples obtained from Anderson tested positive for "Cocaine Metabolite and Cannabinoids."

Notably, Anderson is the cousin of Black Lives Matter co-founder Patrisse Cullors. Cullors resigned as head of the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation in 2021 after it was exposed that Cullors was using the organization as her own personal piggy bank. She paid herself \$120,000 in "consulting fees" and used organization funds to purchase four lavish homes for herself, totaling \$3.2 million.

Reflecting the bankrupt and reactionary racist outlook on police violence that dominates among the upper middle class layers of the BLM movement and the Democratic Party, who seek to obscure the class character of police violence for their own benefit, Melinia Abdullah, co-founder of Black Lives Matter Los Angeles, told *The Guardian* that Anderson's death was a "reminder that when we say 'Black Lives Matter,' we mean our own Black lives, too. We're not fighting for some cause, we're fighting for our own lives and for our people."

Even though African Americans and other minorities are killed at a disproportionate rate compared to their share of the population, the fact is that every year, including the over 1,100 that were killed last year, the largest number of police victims are identified as white and nearly all of them are working class, poor, or suffering from a mental health crisis.

This was the case when Shameka Smith called the LAPD on January 2 to report that her estranged husband, Takar Smith, was violating a restraining order and had showed up at her apartment the previous night.

Despite repeatedly telling the police that her husband and father of six children suffered from schizophrenia and was not on his medication, hours after Shameka called police, they arrived at her residence without a Mental Evaluation Unit (MEU).

The LAPD created MEUs to give the veneer of "reform." MEUs place a social worker, who is allegedly trained in "de-escalation" tactics, with a cop.

In the body camera video released by the police, Smith is shown talking with police for roughly 15 minutes. During the back and forth conversation, Smith makes several incoherent statements. The police ignore his statements and chastise the mentally disturbed man to "quit playing childish games" and "act like an adult."

Smith goes into the kitchen and is followed by multiple police with guns and tasers drawn and pointed at him. After Smith picks up a butcher knife

that is sitting on the kitchen counter, several police deploy their tasers and at least one cop fires a "less lethal" bean bag round.

Smith drops the knife and falls on his knees. None of the police move in to secure the knife or tackle Smith. Instead they hang back and continue to tase him. Once Smith reaches for the knife again and raises it above his head, while still on his knees on the ground, at least two police officers, Joseph Zizzo and Nicolas Alejandre, fired seven shots at him.

Smith immediately falls face first into a pool of his own blood. The body camera footage shows that one of the cops continues to tase Smith for roughly five seconds after he is shot. The police then let Smith bleed out on the floor for over three minutes before turning him over and lazily attempting CPR.

The third person killed by police was Oscar Leon Sanchez. As was the case with Smith and Anderson, despite Sanchez displaying signs of mental illness, the LAPD did not deploy their mental health unit alongside police.

Police were called to the area after multiple people reported a man, matching Sanchez's description, throwing metal objects at cars as they were passing by. By the time police arrived, Sanchez had left the immediate area and was located at an abandoned home, where he apparently had been living.

The body camera footage released by police shows nearly a dozen armed cops confronting Sanchez, who was outside on the second story of the house. Sanchez eventually went inside and shut the door. The police are shown following him with guns drawn and a riot shield.

The body-camera footage is heavily obscured because of the shield. What is clear is that within 10 seconds of opening the door, Sanchez was shot by police, later identified as Diego Bracamontes and Christopher Guerrero, multiple times.

At a press conference Sunday, reported by *LAis*, Ysidro Leon recalled his brother's battles with depression, which intensified after their mother passed three years ago. At the same press conference, Christian Contreras, an attorney for the family, reiterated that Sanchez was "going through a mental health crisis and we know this department is ill-equipped ... to respond to mental health crisis and especially when it involves a Spanish speaker."

The string of killings by the department, which killed at least 31 people last year and 37 in 2021, according to department figures, occurred less than a month after former Democratic representative Karen Bass was sworn in as the new mayor of Los Angeles. In her first official day on the job, Bass declared a state of emergency on homelessness and pledged to hire 250 more police to get out of "desk jobs" and "into patrols."

Bass's declaration was affirmed by the embattled Los Angeles City Council on Tuesday. The council, all Democrats, like Bass, approved the measure 13-0.



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