

Body camera footage released of Utah police shooting Chase Allan during traffic stop

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Farmington, Utah police released the body camera footage of the shooting of Chase Allan last week, who was shot and killed by five police officers during a traffic stop on March 1. Allan was pulled over for an “illegitimate license plate,” with his vehicle lacking a state license plate and instead having a placard in its place.

The footage shows a single officer pull Allan over and approach his vehicle. The officer tells Allan why he was pulled over, to which Allan responds that he is not required to have vehicle registration or to provide identification.

Chase Allan and his family have a history of encounters with the Farmington police and rejection of the validity of traffic laws. Allan’s mother, Diane Allan, filed a lawsuit against the police department alleging that pulling her over for a lack of vehicle registration was illegal and a violation of her constitutional rights.

This rejection of legal authority over them comes from the family’s “sovereign citizen” beliefs. Sovereign Citizens hold a loose set of beliefs based on the idea that state and federal laws do not apply to them because the United States government is illegitimate. The movement has a long history of racist and extreme right-wing and libertarian ideologies, with many claiming that the United States government was secretly replaced in 1933 when the government went bankrupt and began using its citizens as collateral in foreign trade deals. As such, Sovereign Citizens believe that obtaining legal documentation, paying taxes and acquiring government issued identification is part of a conspiracy to turn citizens into financial collateral and enslave them to existing legal and monetary institutions.

During the encounter with the officer Allan can be

heard claiming that he does not have to follow federal or state laws because they are “corporate policy” that a person must be contracted to, and that the officer must prove that he signed a document binding him to state and federal laws. Upon the initial denial of the officer’s request to identify himself the officer that pulled Allan over called for assistance. Four additional officers arrived on the scene shortly afterwards.

Allan eventually provided the officer with a passport, which he says has the words “do not stamp, do not detain” on it. A part of Sovereign Citizens belief is that by printing words on documents they can provide some legal authority or protection from the law. This is most commonly used in efforts to avoid taxes but is also used in an attempt to avoid traffic laws. They generally hold the belief that they are not “driving” but are simply “traveling,” which does not require a license or vehicle registration because they are not transporting goods.

The officer identifies him as Chase Allan, but Allan responds, “That is not me. That is a piece of plastic paper.” The officer then states, “So you have a fraudulent passport? Wonderful, that’s what I’m hearing.”

At this point the officer orders Allan to step out of the vehicle, to which Allan responds, “No.” The officer continues to demand that Allan exit the vehicle as Allan argues that he is not required to and that if they attempt to force him they “are going to have an issue.” At this point in the video Allan can be seen recording the interaction with his phone in his right hand.

As the officers open the car door he moves the phone to his left hand and puts his right hand down by his hip. In the footage a gun holster can be seen and an officer yells out, “Gun! Gun! Gun!” When the footage was released to the public the Farmington police

emphasized this transition of Allan's hand and the gun holster. While they did not make an official claim that Allan was an imminent danger to the officers, the belabored point was clearly intended to direct attention to Allan's possession of a firearm. Since 2021, Utah law allows for the open carry of an unloaded firearm and the concealed carry of a loaded gun for any person above the age of 20 without a permit.

Immediately after the shout that Allan had a gun all five police officers, four of whom had only been on the force for less than a year, opened fire on Allan and his vehicle. The total number of bullets fired is unknown but it is at least 20 and most likely more. The call "Gun!" occurred immediately after Allan's car door was opened and the first shots are fired only a few seconds later. At least one officer can be seen reloading after the call to cease fire.

Footage shows that Allan fell to the ground after being shot, with an empty holster and a handgun on the floor of the driver side of the vehicle. It is unclear if he ever actually reached for the gun or had a hand on it and the police have made no determination yet on this point.

What is clear from the footage is that Allan posed no threat to the officers prior to their attempt to remove him from the car by force. While the US Supreme Court has upheld the authority of officers to demand a person exit a vehicle during a traffic stop, the necessity of such action is questionable.

Allan was certainly "noncompliant," but that in and of itself does not justify the deployment of five armed officers to forcefully remove a man from a car for a lack of vehicle registration, an infraction that carries a \$1,000 fine in the state of Utah.

The significance of Allan's death is not in his refusal to recognize the laws of the United States but in how indicative it is of the experience of millions of working class Americans. Traffic stops are the most common interaction people have with the police, with 50,000 traffic stops occurring every day. Since 2017 more than 800 people have been killed by police during traffic stops.

Officers are trained to treat a traffic stop as a potentially dangerous situation and to react quickly to any perceived threat. However, research from Jordan Woods of the University of Arkansas School of Law found that non-felony traffic stops in Florida accounted

for less than 10 percent of officer fatalities and just 6 percent of officer assaults/injuries with a gun or knife between 2007 and 2016.

Unfortunately, there is little useful data on police violence during traffic stops, with Wood noting that gaps in data make it difficult "to evaluate whether certain exercises of police power during routine traffic stops—such as ordering drivers or passengers out of cars—create avoidable and unnecessary conflicts that may undermine both officer and civilian safety."

Ultimately, the death of Chase Allan is the product of the militarization of the police and the cultivation of reactionary and fascistic forces within departments for the suppression of the class struggle and the preservation of capitalist property rights. As the crisis of American capitalism deepens the police in the US turn to more violent and deadly measures, taking the lives of more than 1,000 people every year, often for little more than "non-compliance."



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