

Farmington, New Mexico man fatally shot by police who went to wrong address

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9 April 2023

Police officers in Farmington, a city of 46,000 in New Mexico's northwestern Four Corners region, shot and killed a resident on the night of April 5 while on a domestic violence call. The officers had gone to the wrong address and shot an innocent man.

At about 11:30 p.m., the Farmington Police Department (FPD) officers had been dispatched to 5308 Valley View Avenue but instead went across the street to 5305. After reportedly knocking on the front door and announcing themselves, they requested dispatch to call the reporting party and have them come to the front door.

The homeowner, 52-year-old Robert Dotson, came to the front door holding a handgun. In what FPD Chief Steve Hebbe called “a chaotic scene,” at least three cops opened fire and struck Dotson, who died at the scene.

Dotson's wife, who also had a handgun, fired at the police but neither she nor any of the officers were hit. FPD officers responded with more shots, but according to a New Mexico State Police statement, “Once she realized that the individuals outside the residence were officers, she put the gun down and complied with the officer's commands.”

The statement did not identify the officers, and in fact, it is unclear how many officers were at the scene of the killing. Hebbe did say that two of the officers have been with the FPD for five years and the third for nine months. Of the three, one has been in a previous officer-involved shooting.

The officers have been put on administrative leave pending a New Mexico State Police investigation. Release of body camera footage will have to wait until after all the officers have been interviewed, a process that will not begin until April 10. An FPD spokesperson did not say how the address mix-up

occurred.

In a video statement, Hebbe's use of such phrases as “a very dark day” for the department, “extremely traumatic event” and “heartbroken” did not prevent hundreds of responses in the comments such as “He [Dotson] had two kids in the home he was protecting. I hope they all are fired. Maybe even charged and the chief resigns”; and “This ... should've never happened. Had these cops done what they're supposed to do an innocent man wouldn't have been killed”; and “I'm not one to bash our cops but this is just wrong.” Many comments called Dotson “a great guy” and called for prosecution of the officers and Hebbe's resignation.

An American Civil Liberties Union of New Mexico statement said that the public deserves “to trust that calling a police officer will help make a situation safer—not cause it to end in tragedy” and demanded “an independent and thorough investigation of the incident, and the Farmington Police Department and the officers involved must be held accountable.”

The incident followed by just a few days a raid on the wrong hotel room in Boston by members of the FBI and the US Army Special Operations Command, who were conducting a training exercise in downtown Boston.

It also comes on the heels of a March 23 admission by Albuquerque Police Department (APD) Chief Harold Medina that 2022 saw a record number of shootings by police: 18, 10 of which were fatal. Medina's admission came nearly nine years after the US Department of Justice and the city reached a settlement agreement supposedly to “reform” the APD following the police murder of mentally ill homeless man James Boyd.



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