

Video released of Chicago police killing 24-year-old on the West Side

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Last Wednesday, the city of Chicago released the body camera footage of the deadly police shooting of 24-year-old black worker Reginald Clay, Jr. The killing took place on April 15 in the West Garfield Park neighborhood.

Police bodycam video shows Chicago Police Officers Fernando Ruiz and Gabriel Bikoma exiting a vehicle outside an apartment building as Clay, facing away from the car, walks away and towards the building's backyard. Officer Ruiz begins running towards Clay, who then runs away into the yard. It is a feature of the bodycam system that footage does not have any audio for the first several minutes, including the time Ruiz first encountered Clay.

Ruiz runs after Clay as he moves to the back of the building and into a dead-end gangway, his gun drawn before Clay turned around to face him. Clay's hand can be seen near his waistband before he pulls out a handgun with his right hand. He then switches the gun to his left hand and moves to set it down on a nearby ledge, evidently attempting to surrender.

Then Ruiz shoots Clay five times. Clay falls to the ground with massive wounds, and raised his hands again when Bikoma approached him with gun drawn. At this point the audio on the footage cuts on. Bystanders can be heard screaming and demanding to know why police shot and killed Clay. One man said they were all attending a funeral.

Clay, who worked at Amazon, leaves behind a 3-year-old daughter as well as his parents, cousins, and other family. The family has filed a federal lawsuit against the Chicago Police Department which claims, "There were no facts to make anyone believe that he was committing a crime or breaking any laws." It alleges the police used "unprovoked and unwarranted" force and violated the department's foot-chase policy.

The foot-chase policy was updated after police gunned down 13-year-old Adam Toledo in 2021, limiting police to pursuit on foot only when there is a valid need to detain someone posing an immediate threat.

The Chicago Police Department has given no answers to family or media as to why Clay was approached and then chased, except to note that there had been a recent shooting in the area. The news media reports the patrol itself was part of a "de-escalation mission." Ruiz, who joined CPD in 2017, was placed on "routine administrative duties" for 30 days.

Protests led by the Clay family have taken place in recent days, including one downtown on Saturday, and his father, Reginald Clay Sr., has called for mayor-elect Brandon Johnson to get involved.

No statement on the murder has been issued by either Johnson, lame duck Mayor Lori Lightfoot or any of the city council members affiliated with the Democratic Socialists of America. The release of the body camera footage comes as Johnson prepares to take office on May 15. The mayoral election campaign was dominated by a "public safety" narrative with all candidates, including Johnson, pledging to bolster the police force.

During Johnson's campaign when meeting with youth organizations and progressive community groups, when asked his position on police funding, he would often respond by commenting that he plans to provide more resources for youth programs and mental health services. However, these comments would almost always be followed up shortly after with reassurances to the right-wing business organizations that he in fact plans to hire more cops and will not "reduce the CPD budget by one penny."

CPD initially claimed Clay had a gun in his hand when he was approached. Now that the video is released, the official account has changed. Police claim that Clay “did not follow verbal direction” and that he assaulted an officer. With no audio until immediately after the shooting, it is impossible to determine what, if anything was said to Clay, and the video shows no evidence of an assault or battery against any officer.

Clay’s killing is one of 254 US police killings so far in 2023. On average the police kill over 1,000 people every year.

The police operate as an occupying force in working class and poor neighborhoods, and the Chicago police have a long record of illegal detention and brutal violence against residents.

In 2015, an article in *The Guardian* revealed that CPD operated an illegal “black site” in the Homan Square neighborhood, near the area where Clay was shot to death, where people were detained, interrogated, and tortured with no access to legal representation. At least one man detained there was killed.

More than 7,000 people were reportedly held secretly and subjected to police abuse at the site, though local defense attorneys have made clear that such police practices are common throughout the city, not just at the Homan Square location.

This police killing of Clay is not unlike many others that have occurred this year. According to mappingpoliceviolence.org police have killed 14 more people through the month of February this year compared to the same period in 2022.

On May 3, Johnson announced that once in office he will name former police chief Fred Waller as interim police superintendent, as a replacement for former superintendent David Brown. Waller is a former Chicago cop who retired from the force in 2020 as third in command. The 61-year-old is a self-proclaimed “beat cop at heart” and has said that he does not intend to take up the position of superintendent permanently, but that he will serve as interim superintendent until a permanent candidate is found.

As for Brown’s permanent replacement, Johnson has stated he would like to choose “an insider” who will help raise the morale of CPD officers after many have retired or otherwise left the department in recent years. Waller has said his goal as interim superintendent is to help Chicago police feel more support, something he

believes they have not received enough of from past administrations. In other words, Waller will continue his record of protecting Chicago police from any kind of scrutiny or consequences as they continue to terrorize the population.

Waller was named chief of patrol in 2016, the CPD’s third-highest ranking position, following several years overseeing patrol districts on the South Side with some of the highest levels of violent crime and police shootings. In a July 2018 press conference, Waller claimed that Harith Augustus, who had been shot and killed by police in the South Shore neighborhood, had “a bulge near his waistband and became combative,” directly contradicting witnesses on the scene.

Waller reassured Chicago’s police that Johnson’s administration would be taking no measures to prevent or punish their criminal actions. Referring to the George Floyd protests, where tens of thousands of people in Chicago protested police violence, he said, “When the civil unrest came, you still have to support those officers and show them that, if you make a mistake, you’re not gonna be thrown out with the trash. They have to feel that support. With this administration, they will,” Waller said.



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