

Baltimore teenager hospitalized after being shot in the back running from police

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16 May 2023

On Thursday, May 11, Baltimore Police Officer Cedric Elleby shot 17-year-old Mekhi Franklin in Southwest Baltimore, Maryland. Franklin was critically wounded and had to be hospitalized for his injuries. He remained in critical condition for several days, and had to have his spleen and left kidney surgically removed. Elleby was placed on administrative leave pending an investigation into the shooting.

According to the *Baltimore Banner*, Franklin's mother Kiera was not allowed to see her son in the hospital initially and had to wait for a police escort. In an interview with the paper she said, "I'm feeling like my son was shot like a dog by Baltimore Police. Now I can't talk to my son." She said further that the police would not tell her whether her son had been charged with a crime or would be charged. Franklin further told WJZ that her son had been shot in the back, "One bullet almost hit his spleen, and the other bullet went through his bladder."

In a statement to the press, Deputy Commissioner Richard Worley said the officer approached the teen because "they believed [he] was displaying the characteristics of an armed person." Worley refused to elaborate on this vague justification for the shooting. Seeking to further shield the officer, Worley stated, "we just know [Franklin] was running with the weapon and he basically ignored several commands to drop the weapon."

According to the police account of events, Franklin started running away as Elleby approached. This led to a foot chase that spanned several blocks through multiple alleyways. At some point Franklin produced a gun in his hand leading the officer to shoot him after ordering him to drop the weapon several times. The police then rendered medical aid before Franklin was taken to a local hospital.

Witnesses to the shooting and the events leading up to it contradicted almost everything the police claimed. Speaking to the *Baltimore Sun*, Daquan Young, a friend of the teen, said Elleby sat down next to Franklin for ten

minutes, before the boy got up and walked away, leading Elleby to pursue him.

Young and Devon Smith, another witness, both told the *Sun* they did not see Franklin holding a gun while running. Smith added that he did not hear the officer tell Franklin to drop the weapon. Both witnesses stated Franklin was shot in the back.

Multiple witnesses said the officer had been harassing Franklin both immediately prior to the shooting and in previous incidents. "This happened previously with the same police officer," Franklin's mother told WJZ. Franklin's friend Young told the *Sun* that the same officer had approached him the day before, calling him names, and telling him that "he needed to lose weight."

Many witnesses demanded the body camera footage be released, indicating that it would contradict the police's account. Speaking to WJZ, an unnamed witness said, "I want to see it as soon as possible, I hope they give the citizens, the community, everybody deserves a chance to see the original tape." Residents further expressed outrage that the Maryland Attorney General would not be investigating the incident.

On Tuesday afternoon the police released a ten-second clip showing the officer pursuing Franklin down a street and shooting him as he turned down an alleyway. The police focused on the fact that an object could be seen in Franklin's right hand while he was running but there is no indication from the footage that Franklin was preparing to use a weapon or posed an immediate threat to the officer or anyone else. It is just as plausible that the 17-year-old Franklin was hoping to ditch the object in the alley.

Brandon Scott, the Democratic Mayor of Baltimore, called the shooting "unfortunate," adding that "it is extremely traumatic for the injured, his family, the community, our police officers, everyone involved." He immediately pivoted, saying his priority is getting illegal guns off the streets. "We will not continue, we cannot

continue to allow folks to carry illegal firearms in our city.”

Elleby is a member of a District Action Team in the Baltimore Police. This is a group of plainclothes officers tasked with finding illegal guns and was set up in the aftermath of the scandal that engulfed the city’s Gun Trace Task Force, which was revealed to be little more than an excuse for racketeering by police officers.

Similar outfits in other cities play the same role of harassing poor and younger residents, often leading to shootings and killings by the police. Franklin’s aunt, Mary Scott, told WBAL-TV that the officers had been riding around the neighborhood the whole week prior in an unmarked white SUV, jumping out and harassing kids, a common motif for these gun task forces.

Youth in Baltimore, as in the rest of the world, confront an out of control social crisis. The conditions leading to the murder of Freddie Gray in 2015 have only worsened since the mass protests which swept the city and the country that year. According to the nonprofit Baltimore’s Promise, 17 percent of youth aged 16 to 24 are unemployed. Baltimore public schools have been cut to the bone, leaving school buildings dilapidated and teachers overworked.

Meanwhile, middle class elements associated with Black Lives Matter have managed to place themselves in positions of privilege by presenting police violence as an explicitly racial phenomenon, avoiding mention of the socio-economic roots of poverty and fundamental class nature of police brutality. The racial narrative of police violence is explicitly undermined in this case, as both the officer and his victim are black.

The police are deployed to keep the working class in line and protect the interests of the city’s wealthy real estate investors and business “stakeholders.”



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