

Prosecutors refuse to press charges against Missouri police officer who shot and killed a mother and her infant child

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Jackson County, Missouri, prosecutors announced Friday evening that they will not press criminal charges against the police officer from the town of Independence who fatally shot Maria Pike and her two-month-old infant, Destinii Hope. Pike and her daughter were killed by the still-unnamed officer on November 7, 2024, after police responded to a domestic violence call.

According to details released by authorities and partial body camera footage, officers were responding to a domestic violence call at an apartment complex. Destinii's grandmother, Talisa Coombs, had called police, alleging that Pike had assaulted her during a visit to check whether she was complying with a Children's Division safety plan.

Police were informed that a child was in the apartment, but they reportedly entered the wrong unit in the complex and held Bug Arnold at gunpoint before proceeding to the correct one. Destinii's father, Mitchell Holder, told the *Kansas City Defender* that he asked if they could speak through the apartment door, saying he did not want his daughter to be around armed officers, but they entered anyway.

Both Holder and Pike reportedly struggled with mental health issues, with Pike suffering from postpartum depression.

After entering the apartment, the two officers encountered Pike in a "nursery-like area" in a walk-in closet, where she was nonverbal toward the officers. The officers reportedly called for backup from a Crisis Intervention Team officer. According to prosecutors, the two officers spent 11 minutes trying to speak with Pike.

Pike then exited the nursery area, passing the officers

to sit on the bed. Despite having called for assistance and Pike not posing any threat, the officers communicated with each other, signaling preparations to make an arrest, which would have required forcibly taking Destinii from her mother.

Pike reportedly then waved her finger "as if to communicate "no" or a negative response to this communication between the officers." Shortly afterward, she grabbed a large kitchen knife from a nightstand next to the bed and held it above her head. One officer ran toward the door while the other immediately drew his weapon and fired at Maria and Destinii.

This information was presented in a sixteen-page letter explaining the decision, signed by prosecutor Melesa Johnson. The document concludes: "After a thorough and independent review of available evidence and applicable legal standards, this Office has determined that we will not file criminal charges against the Shooting Officer."

This decision was justified on the grounds that the officer acted "reasonably" to defend himself from Maria Pike, and that the killing of Destinii could only be considered in the context of whether the officer shot her intentionally. Prosecutors argued that shooting at a woman holding a baby was not an "unjustifiable risk" because the officer believed his life was in danger.

Such legal reasoning—and the entire framework of the prosecutor's decision—is a textbook example of the police's role as enforcers of class rule rather than upholders of public safety. The decision not to prosecute, meaning not even bringing the case before a grand jury to determine if it should proceed to court, is based entirely on the officer's right to act without

regard for public safety.

The document repeatedly states that the officer is not legally bound to “retreat or desist,” meaning the officer had no legal obligation to avoid killing a woman and her baby. It upholds that an officer’s trained instinct to kill is legally justified as a “reasonable response.” It also centers the officers’ authority to arrest Maria Pike, establishing that they were legally authorized to take all “reasonable” actions to make the arrest, including using force, and repeatedly cites the prevention of escape as justification for using force.

Despite having already called for a Crisis Intervention Team and Pike not posing a threat, the officers decided to arrest her in a situation where a mentally distressed mother would have to be forcibly separated from her infant. Regardless of how the law is written, no matter how draconian, it is evident from the available evidence that the officers created a confrontational situation in which the safety of Pike and her baby was secondary to the officers’ authority to use force on their terms.

Additionally, dispatch had informed the officers that Pike might be armed with a knife before they encountered her. The document states that the officers’ “goals upon entering the apartment were to conduct a protective sweep—i.e., a check or search of the unit for weapons or other persons—and to locate the Civilian.” However, the document does not reference any attempt by the officers to search for weapons, nor is such an attempt apparent in the partially released body camera footage, despite them being in the room with Pike for over ten minutes.

In response to the decision, the Kansas City Law Enforcement Accountability Project issued a statement saying, “This outcome is not only a profound failure of our justice system—it is a failure of our collective responsibility to protect and honor every member of our community, including those with mental health issues and disabilities.”

The statement also raised questions that remain unanswered by authorities, including whether Pike still had the knife in her hand when she was shot, the presence of an unexplained bullet entry wound in her back, and the officers’ decision not to wait for the Crisis Intervention Team.

These and other questions cast serious doubt on the prosecutor’s decision and raise concerns about what information is being withheld from the

public—specifically, why the full body camera footage has yet to be released months after the shooting.

It is clear that not all facts are being disclosed and that authorities are withholding information to protect the shooting officer. If the officer’s actions were truly justified, the full body camera footage would have been released to support that claim.

This tragic killing of a distressed mother and her two-month-old baby is all too common. Every year, police kill more than 1,000 people. In 2024, police killed 1,365 people—the highest number ever recorded. So far this year, police have killed 222 people, and 2025 is on track to be another record-breaking year.

Since the killing of George Floyd in 2020 sparked mass protests calling for the defunding of police departments and promises from Democratic politicians to invest in better training and accountability, the number of killings has not declined—in fact, it has increased significantly. By comparison, 1,159 people were killed in 2020, which at the time was a record.



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