

Two Louisville Police Officers Wounded as Dismay Over Breonna Taylor Escalates

Anger, frustration and sadness over the decision not to charge Kentucky police officers for Breonna Taylor's death poured into America's streets as protesters lashed out at a criminal justice system they say is stacked against Black people. Violence seized the demonstrations in her hometown of Louisville as gunfire rang out and wounded two police officers.

Activists, celebrities and everyday Americans have been calling for charges since Taylor, an emergency medical worker, was shot multiple times by white officers who entered her home during a narcotics investigation in March. While the officers had a no-knock warrant, the investigation showed they announced themselves before entering, said state Attorney General Daniel Cameron, a Republican and the state's first Black top prosecutor.

A grand jury returned three charges of wanton endangerment Wednesday against fired Officer Brett Hankison over shooting into a home next to Taylor's with people inside.

Hundreds of demonstrators chanted Taylor's name and marched in cities including New York, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Las Vegas and Portland, Oregon. People gathered in downtown Chicago's Millennium Park, chanting demands for justice as drivers on Michigan Avenue honked their horns. Police in Atlanta unleashed chemical agents and made arrests after some protesters tried to climb on a SWAT vehicle. In Wisconsin, peaceful marchers blocked traffic on an interstate and spoke about Taylor on the steps of the state Capitol.

Nearly 100 people were arrested in Louisville, police said,

after what had been peaceful protests. Police said vehicles were damaged, fires were set in garbage cans and several stores were looted. Two officers were shot, and Interim Police Chief Robert Schroeder said both are expected to recover. One was undergoing surgery. Schroeder said a suspect was in custody, offering no details about whether that person was participating in the protests.

Taylor's case has exposed the wide gulf between public opinion on justice for those who kill Black Americans and the laws under which those officers are charged, which regularly favor police and do not often result in steep criminal accusations.

Carmen Jones has protested in downtown Louisville every day for nearly three months. She said she feels despair after the grand jury's decision and doesn't know what's coming.

"We're tired of being hashtags. We're tired of paying for history in our blood and our bodies and being told to respond to this violence and aggression with peace," she said. "We did it the Martin way for the entire summer, and it got us nowhere. Maybe it's time to do things the Malcolm way."

Jones said she still hopes their demonstrations will lead to systemwide change in the U.S., but the decision in Taylor's case makes her feel like her life doesn't matter in America.

"I don't think I'll sleep the same ever again, cause it would happen to any of us," she said. "The system does not care about Black people. The system chews Black people up and spits us out."

Along with George Floyd, a Black man killed by police in Minneapolis in May, Taylor's name became a rallying cry during nationwide protests that called attention to entrenched racism and demanded police reform. Her image is painted on streets, emblazoned on protest signs and silk-screened on T-shirts worn by celebrities.

The FBI is still investigating potential violations of federal law in connection with the raid at Taylor's home on March 13.

After the announcement, Ben Crump, a lawyer for Taylor's family, denounced the decision as "outrageous and offensive." Protesters shouting, "No justice, no peace!" took to the streets, while others sat quietly and wept.

Morgan Julianna Lee, a high school student in Charlotte, North Carolina, watched the announcement at home.

"It's almost like a slap in the face," the 15-year-old said by phone. "If I, as a Black woman, ever need justice, I will never get it."

Authorities themselves expressed dismay. At a news conference, Cameron, the attorney general, said, "Criminal law is not meant to respond to every sorrow and grief."

"But my heart breaks for the loss of Miss Taylor. ... My mother, if something was to happen to me, would find it very hard," he added, choking up.

However, Cameron said the officers acted in self-defense after Taylor's boyfriend fired at them. Kenneth Walker told police he heard knocking but didn't know who was coming in and fired in self-defense.

The warrant was connected to a suspect who did not live there, and no drugs were found inside. The city has since banned such warrants.

"According to Kentucky law, the use of force by [Officers Jonathan] Mattingly and [Myles] Cosgrove was justified to protect themselves," Cameron said. "This justification bars us from pursuing criminal charges in Miss Breonna Taylor's death."

President Donald Trump read a statement from Cameron, saying "justice is not often easy." He later tweeted that he was

“praying for the two police officers that were shot.”

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden and his running mate, Kamala Harris, called for policing reform.

Biden says that while a federal investigation continues, “we do not need to wait for the final judgment of that investigation to do more to deliver justice for Breonna.” He said the country should start by addressing excessive force, banning chokeholds and overhauling no-knock warrants.

“We must never stop speaking Breonna’s name as we work to reform our justice system, including overhauling no-knock warrants,” Harris said on Twitter.

Hankison was fired on June 23. The three wanton endangerment charges he faces each carry a sentence of up to five years. A termination letter said he had violated procedures by showing “extreme indifference to the value of human life” when he “wantonly and blindly” fired his weapon.

CNN reported that his attorney, David Leightty, declined to comment.

Last week, the city settled a lawsuit against the three officers brought by Taylor’s mother, Tamika Palmer, agreeing to pay her \$12 million and enact police reforms. {eo}

© 2020 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Lovan reported from Frankfort, Kentucky. Associated Press writers Claire Galofaro, Bruce Schreiner and Rebecca Reynolds Yonker in Louisville, Kentucky, Kevin Freking in Washington, Aaron Morrison in New York and Haleluya Hadero in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, contributed.

Hudsbeth Blackburn is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on

undercovered issues.