

What to Know About Breonna Taylor's Death

Fury over the killing of Ms. Taylor by the police in Louisville, Ky., fueled tense demonstrations, and questions persist about how the botched raid unfolded.

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The death of Breonna Taylor, a Black medical worker who was shot and killed by Louisville police officers in March during a botched raid on her apartment, has been one of the main drivers of wide-scale demonstrations that erupted in the spring and summer over policing and racial injustice in the United States.

A grand jury in September indicted a former Louisville detective involved in the raid, Brett Hankison, for wanton endangerment of neighbors whose apartment was hit when he fired without a clear line of sight into the sliding glass patio door and window of Ms. Taylor's apartment. He pleaded not guilty. No charges were announced against the other two officers who fired shots, and no one was charged for causing Ms. Taylor's death.

Detective Myles Cosgrove, one of the officers who shot Ms. Taylor, and Detective Joshua Jaynes, who prepared the search warrant for the raid, received letters of termination in late December, according to lawyers representing the officers. Detectives Cosgrove and Jaynes were officially fired on Jan. 5, according to The Louisville Courier-Journal.

A new New York Times examination of video footage from the scene, witness accounts, statements by the police officers and forensics reports showed that the raid was compromised by poor planning and reckless execution. It found that the only support for a grand jury's conclusion that the officers had announced themselves before bursting into Ms. Taylor's apartment — beyond the assertions of the officers themselves — was the account of a single witness who had given inconsistent statements.

Also in December, the police in Oakland, Calif., were investigating an apparent act of vandalism directed at a bust of Ms. Taylor that had been installed near City Hall. The sculptor, Leo Carson, said the statue had been smashed into several pieces.

"I built it to support the Black Lives Matter movement," Mr. Carson said in an interview, "but that also makes it a target for racist aggression."

Since the national demonstrations over police brutality and systemic racism that began in late May, Louisville officials have banned the use of no-knock warrants, which allow the police to forcibly enter people's homes to search them without warning, and, in late June, fired Mr. Hankison, finding that he had shown "an extreme indifference to the value of human life."

For months, Ms. Taylor's family has pleaded for justice, pushing for criminal charges against the other officers. Ms. Taylor's case began to draw national attention in May, and she has since been the center of campaigns from several celebrities and athletes, some of whom have dedicated their seasons to keeping a spotlight on her case. In September, Louisville officials agreed to pay \$12 million to settle a wrongful-death lawsuit brought by Ms. Taylor's mother and to institute reforms aimed at preventing future deaths by officers.

Still, critics say progress in the case has been slow, especially when compared with the police killing in May of George Floyd in Minneapolis, where officers were swiftly fired and charged.

"At this point it's bigger than Breonna, it's bigger than just Black Lives," Ms. Taylor's mother, Tamika Palmer, said over the summer as she beseeched the authorities to bring criminal charges. "We've got to figure out how to fix the city, how to heal from here."

What happened in Louisville?

Shortly after midnight on March 13, Louisville police officers executing a search warrant used a battering ram to enter the apartment of Ms. Taylor, a 26-year-old emergency room technician.

The police had been investigating two men who they believed were selling drugs out of a house that was far from Ms. Taylor's home. But a judge had also signed a warrant allowing the police to search Ms. Taylor's residence because the police said they believed that one of the men had used her apartment to receive packages. Ms. Taylor had been dating that man on and off for several years but had recently severed ties with him, according to her family's lawyer.

Ms. Taylor and her boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, had been in bed, but got up when they heard a loud banging at the door. Mr. Walker said he and Ms. Taylor both called out, asking who was at the door. Mr. Walker later told the police he feared it was Ms. Taylor's ex-boyfriend trying to break in.

After the police broke the door off its hinges, Mr. Walker fired his gun once, striking Sgt. Jonathan Mattingly in a thigh. The police responded by firing several shots, striking Ms. Taylor five times. Mr. Hankison shot 10 rounds blindly into the apartment.

Mr. Walker told investigators that Ms. Taylor coughed and struggled to breathe for at least five minutes after she was shot, according to The Louisville Courier Journal. An ambulance on standby outside the apartment had been told to leave about an hour before the raid, counter to standard practice. As officers called an ambulance back to the scene and struggled to render aid to their colleague, Ms. Taylor was not given any medical attention.

It was not until 12:47 a.m., about five minutes after the shooting, that emergency personnel realized she was seriously wounded, after her boyfriend called 911.

“I don’t know what’s happening,” Mr. Walker said on a recorded call to 911. “Someone kicked in the door and shot my girlfriend.”

Ms. Taylor received no medical attention for more than 20 minutes after she was struck, The Courier Journal reported, citing dispatch logs.

The Jefferson County coroner told The Courier Journal that Ms. Taylor most likely died less than a minute after she was shot and could not have been saved.

While the department had received court approval for a “no-knock” entry, the orders were changed before the raid to “knock and announce,” meaning that the police had to identify themselves.

The officers have said they did announce themselves, but Mr. Walker said he did not hear anything.

No drugs were found in the apartment, a lawyer for Mr. Walker said.

Jamarcus Glover, Ms. Taylor’s ex-boyfriend whose alleged packages led the police to her door that night, was arrested on Aug. 27 in possession of drugs, according to a charging document. He told The Courier Journal that Ms. Taylor had no involvement in the drug trade. “The police are trying to make it out to be my fault and turning the whole community out here, making it look like I brought this to Breonna’s door,” he said.

Ms. Taylor’s mother, Tamika Palmer, said her daughter had big dreams and planned a lifelong career in health care after serving as an E.M.T.

“She was a better version of me,” said Ms. Palmer, a dialysis technician. “Full of life. Easy to love.”

“Breonna was a woman who was figuring everything out in her life, who had turned a corner,” said Sam Aguiar, a lawyer representing Ms. Taylor’s family. “Breonna was starting to live her best life.”

Why did the police fire their weapons?

Breonna Taylor, 26, was killed on March 13 by officers executing a so-called no-knock warrant.
Family of Breonna Taylor, via Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

The Louisville police say that they fired inside Ms. Taylor’s home only after they were first fired upon by Mr. Walker, Ms. Taylor’s boyfriend. They said that Mr. Walker wounded one of the officers, who was hit in the leg but was expected to make a full recovery. Mr. Walker was subsequently charged with attempted murder of a police officer, though the charge was dismissed in May.

The police also assert that they knocked several times and identified themselves as police officers with a warrant before entering the apartment. Mr. Walker has said he and Ms. Taylor heard aggressive banging at the door and asked who it was, but they did not hear an announcement that it was the police.

The police said that the officers “forced entry into the exterior door and were immediately met with gunfire.” Three officers returned fire, the police said.

One of the officers, Mr. Hankison, was fired, and another, Detective Cosgrove, received a letter of termination in December. The other officer, Sergeant Mattingly, was been placed on administrative reassignment.

Is the police account disputed?

Yes, hotly. Ms. Taylor’s relatives and their lawyers say that the police never identified themselves before entering — despite their claims. They also say that Mr. Walker was licensed to carry a gun.

And Mr. Walker, 27, has said that he feared for his life and fired in self-defense, believing that someone was trying to break into the home. “He didn’t know these were police officers, and they found no drugs in the apartment — none,” said Rob Eggert, Mr. Walker’s lawyer. “He was scared for his life, and her life.”

Understand the George Floyd Case

- On May 25, 2020, Minneapolis police officers arrested George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, after a convenience store clerk claimed he used a counterfeit \$20 bill to buy cigarettes.
- Mr. Floyd died after Derek Chauvin, one of the police officers, handcuffed him and pinned him to the ground with a knee, an episode that was captured on video.
- Mr. Floyd’s death set off a series of nationwide protests against police brutality.
- Mr. Chauvin was fired from Minneapolis police force along with three other officers. He has been charged with second-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter and now faces trial, which is likely to begin the week of March 8.
- [Here is what we know up to this point in the case, and how the trial is expected to unfold.](#)

In a 911 call just after the shots were fired, Mr. Walker told a dispatcher that “somebody kicked in the door and shot my girlfriend.”

The police’s incident report contained multiple errors. It listed Ms. Taylor’s injuries as “none,” even though she had been shot several times, and indicated that officers had not forced their way into the apartment — though they used a battering ram to break the door open.

Ms. Taylor’s family also said it was outrageous that the police felt it necessary to conduct the raid in the middle of the night. Their lawyers say the police had already located the main suspect in the investigation by the time they burst into the apartment. But they “then proceeded to spray gunfire into the residence with a total disregard for the value of human life,” according to a wrongful-death lawsuit filed by Ms. Taylor’s mother.

There was no body camera footage from the raid. And, for now, prosecutors have said they had dismissed the charges against Mr. Walker, adding that they would let investigations into the killing run their course before making any final decisions. Some legal experts said the fact that prosecutors dropped charges after a grand jury indictment suggested that they may have doubts about the version of events told by the police.

Has there been other fallout?

Some — even aside from the continuing protests.

On June 23, the Louisville Metro Police Department released a letter of termination that it sent to Mr. Hankison, the officer who “blindly fired” 10 rounds into a covered patio door and a window, according to the termination letter.

Chief Robert Schroeder accused Mr. Hankison of violating the Police Department’s policy on the use of deadly force, saying his actions were “a shock to the conscience” that discredited the Police Department.

Detectives Cosgrove and Jaynes also received letters of termination. In her letter to Detective Jaynes, Chief Yvette Gentry said he was being fired for violating department policies on search warrants and truthfulness.

Thomas Clay, a lawyer representing Detective Jaynes, said his client had never lied in getting the search warrant to search Ms. Taylor’s apartment. The detective would get an opportunity to respond to the chief’s claims at a department hearing, according to the letter.

Also, city officials banned the use of no-knock warrants on June 11.

Mayor Greg Fischer has announced other changes to ensure “more scrutiny, transparency and accountability,” including the naming of a new police chief; a new requirement that body cameras always be worn during the execution of search warrants; and the establishment of a civilian review board for police disciplinary matters.

One of the officers involved, Sergeant Mattingly, sued Mr. Walker for assault and battery. In a court document filed on Oct. 29, counsel for Sergeant Mattingly said he should be entitled to compensatory damages for the medical treatment, trauma, physical pain and mental anguish he experienced as a result of the night Ms. Taylor died. Steve Romines, Mr. Walker's lawyer, said the charges were baseless.

Sergeant Mattingly had previously told ABC News and The Louisville Courier Journal in an interview broadcast on Oct. 21 that the case was not comparable to those of other Black people whose killings have become the focus of national protests.

"This is not relatable to a George Floyd. This is nothing like it. It's not an Ahmaud Arbery. It's nothing like it," he said.

He said the Louisville officers were doing their job when they returned fire: "This is not us going hunting somebody down, this is not kneeling on a neck."

About 15 hours' worth of grand jury audio was released.

On Oct. 2, recordings of about 15 hours from the grand jury inquiry were released. The audio files have begun to shed light on what evidence jurors considered when choosing to indict Mr. Hankison and declining to bring charges against the other police officers involved in the shooting.

Grand jurors heard at least two police officers who were at the raid on Ms. Taylor's apartment say the group knocked and announced their presence several times before breaking down the door.

Those accounts have been questioned by several of Ms. Taylor's neighbors and her boyfriend. Detective Cosgrove said officers knocked for 90 seconds, and that the volume escalated from "gentle knocking" to "forceful pounding" to pounding while yelling "police."

For one to two minutes, Detective Michael Nobles said he knocked and announced himself as the police before using a battering ram to force his way into Ms. Taylor's apartment.

Grand jurors were played recordings of radio calls from Mr. Hankison as well as 911 calls made after the shooting began. The calls suggest that Mr. Hankison believed that Sergeant Mattingly had been wounded by someone with an "A.R." who was "barricaded" inside the apartment.

Mr. Hankison's reference to an "A.R." on the call appears to be a reference to either an assault rifle or the AR-15, a type of a military-style semiautomatic rifle.

Grand jurors also raised several questions, including if Mr. Walker had been named in the search warrant (he had not), what exactly the officers saw when the apartment door opened and whether the officers executing the warrant were aware that the police had already found Mr. Glover.

The release of the recordings came after one of the grand jurors filed a court motion that asked for the proceedings to be made public; the juror also accused Kentucky's attorney general, Daniel Cameron, of using the jurors "as a shield to deflect accountability and responsibility." Mr. Cameron has insisted that jurors were given "all of the evidence."

A Kentucky judge on Oct. 20 granted grand jurors permission to speak publicly. That led to a statement from an anonymous juror, who said the group "didn't agree that certain actions were justified, nor did it decide the indictment should be the only charges in the Breonna Taylor case."

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