PERSPECTIVE

ILLUSTRATION: SCOTT RITTER/THE DAY

Phony, racist diagnosis wrongly used to justify police brutality, doctors say

By MÉABH O'HARE, JOSHUA BUDHU and ALTAF SAADI

LAST YEAR, AFTER POLICE HAD placed Elijah McClain in a chokehold, then handcuffed him, paramedics injected him with a dose of ketamine, a powerful sedative. They said he "appeared to be" exhibiting signs of "excited delirium"; he subsequently went into cardiac arrest and died. Earlier this year, police officers in Tacoma, Wash., cited excited delirium in the case of another unarmed black man, Manuel Ellis, who died in custody. And as Derek Chauvin knelt on George Floyd's neck for the final moments of his life, a fellow police officer said, "I am concerned about excited delirium or whatever." This may be part of Chauvin's defense against murder charges.

Across the United States, police officers are routinely taught that excited delirium is a condition characterized by the abrupt onset of aggression and distress, typically accompanying drug abuse, often resulting in sudden death. One 2014 article from the FBI's Law Enforcement Bulletin describes "excited delirium syndrome" as "a serious and potentially deadly medical condition involving psychotic behavior, elevated temperature, and an extreme fight-or-flight response by the nervous system."

How often is excited delirium invoked? It's unclear, but in Florida at least 53 deaths in police custody were attributed to it over the past 10 years. One study showed that 11% of sudden unexplained deaths in police custody in Maryland from 1990 to 2004 were attributed to excited delirium.

The American College of Emergency Physicians published a controversial position paper in 2009 stating its consensus that excited delirium is a valid disease, associated with a significant risk of sudden death.

But excited delirium is pseudoscience.

SEE 'EXCITED DELIRIUM' PAGE B6

'I have done nothing to cause feelings of guilt': A veteran officer speaks out

By BRUCE W. BABCOCK

I HAVE BEEN A SWORN MEMBER of the East Lyme Police Department for 36 years, and I want to preface my ensuing narrative with the following statement: What happened to George Floyd in Minneapolis was a tragic, violent, criminal act, and the police officer who perpetrated this inhumane crime, although he is entitled to the due process rights granted to every American citizen, should and will be prosecuted.

Everyone I know is appalled by the events captured on the video; however, the behavior of many citizens, during the aftermath of this tragedy, has been fraught with antipathy toward police officers all over the country.

In response to this unfair demonization, I feel compelled to respond and remind the citizens of East Lyme just who polices their community. The overwhelming majority of men and women with whom I presently work or have worked during my career are responsible, dedicated people. They started this job with noble, altruistic intentions, such as serving, protecting, and helping people with problems.

For some, it is not a job; it's a calling.

Life's dark side

They are mothers, fathers, grandparents, and your neighbors. Many reside in the community they police. Their children are educated in our school system. They patronize local businesses and volunteer their time coaching your children in youth sports. Some volunteer their time with our fire departments, responding to structure fires and medical emergencies. They own property and pay their taxes. Generally speaking, they are invested heavily in the community they serve.

Professionally, they respond to every conceivable emergency, including motor

SEE POLICE PAGE B6

Connecticut Republicans are fighting a losing and foolish battle

PAUL CHOINIERE
p.choiniere@theday.com

THE DAY

Before seemingly coming to their senses in the early morning hours Friday, Connecticut Republicans had badly miscalculated in fighting a foolish legal fight against wider use of absentee ballots in the Aug. 11 primary and general election Nov. 3. The impression the state party has left is that they want to make it more difficult for people to vote during an ongoing health crisis. In doing so, state Republicans have aligned themselves with their national party's voter suppression strategy. That is not going to play well in Connecticut.

And they have done all this self-inflicted damage with little chance to succeed legally, which was well evidenced this past week when Republicans lost not one, but two court decisions in cases championed by the party's state chairman, J.R. Romano.

The first decision came from the Connecticut Supreme Court in a case brought by four Republicans running for Congress, all with chances of slim and none to be elected. And, as the saying goes, Slim has left town.

Plaintiffs in the case are Mary Fay, James Griffin, Justin Anderson and Thomas Gilmer. What, these names aren't familiar?

Griffin and Fay are competing in the Aug. 11 Republican primary to run against U.S. Rep. John Larson, D-First District, and Anderson and Gilmer are contesting to run against U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney, the Democrat serving eastern Connecticut's Second District.

Secretary of the State Denise Merrill and Gov. Ned Lamont, both Democrats, are trying to make it easier and safer for people to vote, including in the primary. Merrill has mailed out about 1.2 million absentee ballot applications to registered Republicans and Democrats for the primary. About 200,000 voters have responded to request absentee ballots because they would rather mail-in or drop off their ballot than risk getting sick to vote in person.

The plaintiffs say this is unconstitutional, because the Connecticut Constitution only allows absentee voting for "sickness," not threat of sickness, and claim Lamont exceeded his executive authority by ordering the expansion of the definition.

In dismissing the lawsuit on Monday, state Supreme Court Chief Justice Richard Robinson basically said, "What are you doing here?"

Officially, he said, the court had no jurisdiction because the plaintiffs were using a contested election statute "limited to challenges for federal office with respect to general elections."

And this is, you know, a primary.

So, down to Superior Court they went where — THE NEXT DAY — Judge Thomas G. Moukawsher rejected their central claim that Lamont overstepped his authority.

The attorney for the ill-fated four announced they intended to appeal Moukawsher's decision to — can you guess it? — the state Supreme Court. Good luck with that.

Meanwhile, in a marathon special session that began Thursday and continued through the night and did not end until after sunrise Friday, the legislature voted to officially extend widespread absentee balloting use to the general election in November. Senate approval is certain when it meets next week. Given that the legislature has wide latitude to define the perimeters set by the Constitution on absentee ballot qualifications, that should be the end of that debate, legally speaking.

Most House Republicans joined Democrats in the 142-4 vote to approve broader absentee balloting during the pandemic, smartly deciding they didn't want to die on that hill.

But top Republicans continue to complain about Merrill's plan to mail all registered voters absentee applications. Sounding disconcertingly like our president, they say they're concerned the plan could lead to significant voter fraud. But, like President Trump, they provide no convincing evidence how that fraud would happen.

Larger voting turnouts tend to benefit Democrats. Making it easier to vote should boost turnout. That is a political calculation both parties recognize, their attempts to clad their intentions in loftier ideals notwithstanding.

Paul Choiniere is the editorial page editor.