

No charges in teenager's death - Archer Amorosi - Star Tribune: Newspaper of the Twin Cities (MN) - October 12, 2018 - page 01B

October 12, 2018 | Star Tribune: Newspaper of the Twin Cities (MN) | LIZ SAWYER; STAFF WRITER | Page 01B

In the midst of a mental health crisis, 16-year-old **Archer Amorosi** burst through the front door of his Chanhassen home brandishing a hatchet and a handgun-style BB gun — then headed straight for police officers waiting on the front lawn.

In the 90 seconds that followed, authorities say the Chanhassen teen refused to drop the weapons and officers fatally shot him. The FBI-trained crisis negotiator on the scene never had a chance to talk him down.

"It was too late," Carver County Attorney Mark Metz said Thursday after ruling the July 13 shooting justified and declining to file criminal charges against the officers involved, who have since returned to duty. "They had no way of knowing it would escalate that quickly."

Soon after their son's death, Amorosi's family raised questions about how police handle calls involving mental illness and demanded reforms.

"No parent should have to hesitate to call law enforcement to help their child during a mental health crisis because of fear that an officer may kill their son or daughter," said an Amorosi family statement released through their attorney, Paul Dworak.

Of 169 fatal police shootings across Minnesota since 2000, 71 of those shot had a history of mental illness or were in the throes of a mental health crisis at the time of the shooting, according to a recent Star Tribune analysis. In response, some Minnesota police departments have tasked officers or others specially trained in mental health issues to respond to emergency calls.

An investigation by the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension found that the situation quickly escalated into chaos after Kara Amorosi called 911 to report that her son was suicidal and carrying around knives and a baseball bat.

According to the 911 transcript, Kara said Archer was being violent and destructive.

"He's going to do something bad," she told the dispatcher, adding that he had locked her in the garage. "He's not well right now. I'm worried for him."

Carver County Deputy Travis Larson and Cpl. Jacob Hodge, the first at the scene, located Amorosi pacing shirtless inside the house holding what appeared to be a gun.

Over the course of about 15 minutes, Amorosi alternated between verbally threatening deputies and aiming the firearm at them, the BCA said. Officers tried to subdue him with a Taser and pepper spray, but both were ineffective.

At one point, he fled the house waving the gun and hatchet above his head. He fell to the ground after being shot for a second time with a Taser, the report said, but quickly got back up and ran toward Hodge yelling, "I'm gonna kill you."

"Unfortunately, once Archer charged at Corporal Hodge in 'a full sprint' with the hatchet, less than lethal force was no longer a plausible option," said Metz, who hired an independent use-of-force expert to help review the evidence. "Their actions are reasonable under the law."

Metz publicly announced his decision Thursday after meeting with Amorosi's parents at his office.

Although Carver County deputies did not activate their body camera footage, South Minnetonka police body cameras recorded audio and video of the incident, including the final moments.

"Drop it, drop it, stop, get your hands in the air, drop it, drop it!" multiple deputies can be heard yelling in the audio, according to Metz's report.

"Shoot! Shoot!" Amorosi can be heard saying in response. One minute later, both deputies opened fire.

Deputy Greg Gowan, an FBI-trained negotiator, watched the episode unfold from a distance, unable to get close enough to communicate with Amorosi. He'd hoped the teen would retreat into the house so they could try to talk him down via phone. "But with him loose in the neighborhood with a gun in his hand ... there was never an opportunity to do anything," he later told investigators.

Amorosi was pronounced dead just 25 minutes after texting his parents and three sisters: "Goodbye I love you all."

"I never, ever should have called 911," Kara Amorosi recently told the Star Tribune, wiping away tears. "I will regret that every day for the rest of my life."

The family's statement says, "The report omits crucial ... information while emphasizing irrelevant material. [It] does not state whether Archer was shot in the back or the front. ... Where Archer was shot is certainly more germane to a use-of-force analysis than Archer's text messages ... which the deputies had no knowledge of at the time they decided to use deadly force."

The day before the fatal encounter, Don Amorosi called 911 to report that his son had become enraged after losing his car privileges. He also told the dispatcher that his son had not taken his medication for depression and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder.

He warned dispatchers that Archer was hostile to law enforcement, but assured them that he had no access to firearms on the property other than an airsoft pellet gun.

Don had first called a mental health crisis center, but was told that the situation did not meet its requirements for a medical transport and advised to call police. Don had wanted first responders to de-escalate the situation and worried that an active police response might have the opposite effect.

"I fear that SWAT people are gonna go in and kick the door down and shoot him," he told the dispatcher. Less than 24 hours later, a version of that scenario played out on the family's front lawn.

Don Amorosi is certain it could have turned out differently. "If they had slowed down and brought [mental health] professionals, no one would be dead," he said in a recent interview. "He was the greatest gift I ever had."

The family plans to review the entire BCA investigative file before deciding whether to pursue a civil suit.

Liz Sawyer • 612-673-4648

Copyright 2018 Star Tribune: Newspaper of the Twin Cities