

Family of man fatally shot by CPD officer sues cop, city

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FULL TEXT

The family of a man fatally shot last month by a Chicago police officer in an incident captured on video filed a lawsuit Monday alleging he was shot in the back while unarmed.

The video, made public last week by police oversight officials, showed the tactical officer fatally shooting Maurice Granton Jr., 24, as he tried to scale a fence while running from police June 6 in the Bronzeville neighborhood.

The lawsuit alleges that Granton cannot be seen carrying a gun or other weapon in the police body camera footage released by authorities.

He posed no threat of harm to police or the public, it contended.

At a news conference Monday, attorney Antonio Romanucci, who represents LaTayshia Shaw, the mother of Granton's two young children, criticized the limited information released so far by authorities, saying it allows police and other city officials to control the narrative about the shooting.

"He was unarmed when the foot chase began, and we know for a fact he was unarmed when the chase ended," Romanucci said. "It's what we cannot see on video that the city will not tell us. Had better training been in place, Maurice would still be here today."

At the time of the shooting, the Police Department released a statement saying Granton had "produced a weapon" before an "armed encounter" with police took place. It also initially released limited video footage it said showed Granton holding a gun shortly before the shooting. The department also tweeted a photo of a 9 mm handgun it said was recovered from the shooting scene.

"If you're going to release any evidence, then release it all or don't release any," Romanucci told reporters at his law office. "They can control the narrative ... to shape public opinion to make this look like this is about something that it's not when's it's really about transparency and getting to the truth and finding out what happened."

The lawsuit also complained that 1 1/2 years after the U.S. Department of Justice found widespread problems with Chicago police, the department still has not developed a policy on foot pursuits.

Bill McCaffrey, a spokesman for the city's Law Department, declined to comment on the lawsuit, saying he had not seen a copy.

The lawsuit, filed in Cook County Circuit Court, names the city and Officer Sheldon Thrasher as defendants.

Documents released last week by the Civilian Office of Police Accountability identified Thrasher as the officer who fatally shot Granton. Records show the officer joined the department in 2013.

COPA, the city agency that investigates police-involved shootings, released the video last week after Granton's family viewed the footage.

The shooting remains under investigation.

Police Department officials said both Thrasher and a second officer involved in the shooting have returned to active duty after taking a mandatory 30-day leave following the incident.

Romanucci said Thrasher fired at least three shots, striking Granton at least once in the back and severing his spinal cord.

The lawsuit alleges that as a crowd emerged at the scene, Thrasher, who is African-American, could be heard "mocking" Granton, telling onlookers, "You see your homie right there."

Granton was writhing in pain on the video, according to the lawsuit. He was pronounced dead a short time later at the University of Chicago Medical Center.

At the time of Granton's fatal shooting, police said he ignored orders to stop during a foot chase, pulled a weapon and fired at the officer before he was shot.

A use-of-force report filed by Thrasher -- released by COPA along with other audio and video evidence -- said he reported to supervisors that Granton was armed with a semi-automatic pistol and fired on him.

Police Department officials said the Wentworth District tactical officers were in the area conducting a narcotics investigation when they were directed to the 300 block of East 47th Street.

Surveillance footage showed Granton and others milling around under the CTA Green Line before a police car pulled up and the men scattered.

The body camera from one officer captured him saying, "Come here, man," and then chasing Granton, who jumped a wooden fence, leaving the view of that officer's body camera. That officer abandoned the chase, shouting in pain. The view from his camera indicated he was limping away.

But his camera captured the sound of a single gunshot, then a pause, followed by three more shots in quick succession.

The body camera footage posted from the officer who appears to have opened fire did not include audio at the time of the shooting.

That video showed Granton running across a vacant lot and darting onto a wrought iron fence with one leg raised. As both hands reached for the top of the fence, the officer can be seen raising his gun. The footage then showed Granton immediately fall from the fence, stumble to his left a few feet and then drop to the ground, writhing in pain. Granton was shot in the back, according to the Cook County medical examiner's office. Authorities have not said how many times he was shot.

Granton's girlfriend did not speak at the news conference, but his father, Maurice Sr., wearing a red T-shirt with his son's image emblazoned on it with the message "Heaven Couldn't Wait In Loving Memory, Maurice Granton 1994-2018," told reporters he was "living every parent's nightmare."

"The Chicago Police Department claims this incident was an armed confrontation," said Granton, his hands clasped in front as he spoke. "Nowhere on the videos do you see my son armed, and nowhere on the videos do you see a confrontation. My son was running away."

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CAPTION: Photo: (Maurice) Granton (Jr.) ; Photo: Maurice Granton Sr. attends Monday's news conference on a lawsuit in the police shooting of his son. ANTONIO PEREZ/TRIBUNE

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