

It's unlikely anyone will ever know what went - Villager, The (Northborough-Southborough, MA) - August 24, 2018 - page A2

August 24, 2018 | Villager, The (Northborough-Southborough, MA) | Eli Sherman esherman@wickedlocal.com
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It's unlikely anyone will ever know what went through the mind of Weymouth Police Sgt. Michael Chesna in the moments leading up to his death.

But court documents detailing the deadly July 15 morning suggest Chesna had his gun drawn and didn't fire, even as his alleged killer charged him with a rock.

Whatever his reasons, the decision not to pull the trigger is feeding into a national debate surrounding police-involved shootings, arguably one of the most-divisive community-based issues in modern times.

"When (officers) have to make a decision, they have to make it in a split second, and if there's hesitation -- hesitation that they might be the next case nationwide that takes their livelihood, their family and their reputation away from them -- hesitation gets officers harmed," said Weymouth Police Chief Richard Grimes during a vigil for Chesna.

In Massachusetts, Chesna is the sixth police officer to die by gunfire in the last decade and the second to die this year, according to Officer Down Memorial Page, a nonprofit that tracks line-of-duty deaths nationwide.

Marshfield Police Chief Phil Tavares says the job has become more dangerous, citing an increasing "disrespect for authority." And Grimes believes the widespread criticism makes the job more difficult, especially for beat police.

"This is a bad message to send to the men and women that are on the street every day just like Michael," Grimes said.

The sentiment is echoed among rank and file, including Officer Edward O'Brien, of the Weymouth Police Department, who expressed his frustration in a July 22 Facebook post.

"We make mistakes like everyone else. We're not perfect and we have bad apples like every other profession," he wrote. "The country has labeled and vilified police officers to a point that a small but vocal portion of the public thinks that all officers are crooked, uneducated and bullies. Take a look at the facts. None of that narrative is true and I'm done trying to apologize for it."

Much of the public scrutiny has been building for years and stems from the hundreds of fatal shootings by law enforcement reported each year in the United States, which advocates argue happen without much accountability.

"Accountability for police use of lethal force is severely lacking in the United States," according to a 2015 report by Amnesty International, a human rights organization.

In the wake of the 2014 fatal shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, which sparked protests across the country and the formation of Black Lives Matter and subsequently Blue Lives Matter, The Washington Post started tracking fatal shootings by police.

As of July 9, the newspaper reported 576 people across the country had been shot and killed by police in 2018, which is 10 more than the same period last year. The number of deaths during 2017 totaled 987, according to the database. In Massachusetts, 25 people have been shot and killed by police since 2015, which includes **Alan Greenough**, who was shot dead by Reading Police in February.

Unlike the shooting of Chesna, however, there's not much known publicly about Greenough's killing. Fatal shootings by law enforcement in Massachusetts are investigated by district attorney offices and the Massachusetts State Police. And because no charges are brought against the dead, public information about the shooting isn't released until charges are filed, or the investigation concludes.

A Middlesex DA spokeswoman told Wicked Local on July 25 the Greenough investigation, which started in February, remains open and ongoing. She could not provide a timeline for when it might come to a close. The opaque investigative process fuels public perception -- deserved or not -- that there's a lack of impartial and independent accountability when it comes to fatal shootings by police, according to advocates.

"The fact that investigations are handled internally and that prosecutors have to maintain good working relationships with the police as well as fulfill their duty to investigate and prosecute police use of lethal force, has led to calls being made for independent investigations and prosecutors," according to Amnesty International.

Massachusetts is also one of nine states without laws on the use of lethal force by law enforcement officers, according to Amnesty International, which violates international standards, according to a special report done for the United Nations Human Rights Council.

"The police in any society will at some point be confronted with a situation where they have to decide whether to use force and, if so, how much. Enacting an adequate domestic legal framework for such use of force by police officials is thus a state obligation, and the states that do not do this are in violation of their international obligations," according to the report.

The tension between local police and their communities, however, is not absolute, and Chesna's death is evidence. Thousands of Massachusetts residents attended a vigil for Chesna. And letters and social media posts detailing appreciation and gratitude for police have flooded into the Norfolk County community.

Following the sergeant's death, Gov. Charlie Baker, a Republican, signed into law a new \$2 fee on rental cars to fund more police training and new recruits. The new fee will fund up to \$10 million each year, which Baker -- who generally opposes new taxes and fees -- told the State House News

Service was needed, especially after the deaths of Chesna and other officers in recent years.

"I know this bill isn't named after anybody, but if it were to be named after someone, I think we would choose to name it after the men and women who have been killed in the line of duty and their families," Baker said.

For Grimes, moving forward, he's asking the public for empathy.

"The courts, the politicians and everybody in this country should put themselves in that split-second decision and you tell me," he said.

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