

# 'Don't do it': Officers in shooting cleared, family still wants answers

**Publication info:** University Wire ; Carlsbad [Carlsbad]15 Apr 2018.

[ProQuest document link](#)

---

## FULL TEXT

Publication: Daily O'Collegian, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater OK.

The evening of March 28, William John Dominguez called 911 and said he was headed for hell.

"I have a gun and a knife in my back pocket and my waist," Dominguez said in the 911 recording the Stillwater Police Department released. "There's nothing for me to live for."

Dispatcher Vanessa Prince talked with Dominguez, 31, for about 10 minutes as he walked along Boomer Road in Stillwater. He relayed his long history of mental illness, telling her he had been on "multiple psych meds" since he was 5.

"That's a pretty long history of dealing with it," Prince said. "Has anything in the past worked, any kind of medication at all? Ever?"

"Yeah," Dominguez replied. "And when I told the doctor that—"

Dominguez was interrupted when two Stillwater police officers arrived on scene.

"Hey, buddy, come here," one officer can be heard saying.

The officers had driven past Dominguez and pulled into a parking lot near Stillwater High School's football stadium. Visible on dashcam footage SPD released, they got out of their cars.

"Well, I thought about just hitting the lights and turning them on and stopping him," one officer said. "But—"

"I don't want to be right next to traffic if he's suicidal," the other finished.

"Exactly."

One officer can be seen grabbing his assault rifle from his patrol car.

"If he's got a gun in his waistband," he said.

The officers moved toward Dominguez, stepping out of one dashcam's frame. The dashcam in the other officer's patrol car reportedly malfunctioned, and SPD has not located its footage.

The officers cannot be seen, but the audio continues.

"Did they say his name?" one asked the other. "Did they say what his name was?"

Seconds after their initial contact, the officers' tones changed.

"Don't do it," one officer warned. "Don't do it."

"Don't," the other commanded. "Don't do it."

Four gunshots rang out. Dominguez was shot and killed.

Dominguez reportedly pulled out his weapons, and the officers fired "to stop his actions," according to an SPD press release.

Thursday, officials announced the shooting was justified and released the names of the officers involved.

Officers Micheal Casteel and Trevor Meridith, and Prince, the dispatcher, all declined requests for comment Thursday.

'It was a call for help'

OSBI agents waited to identify Dominguez until they made contact with his next of kin, which happened two days after the shooting when his brother, Raphael Dominguez, 29, called them.

Raphael, who lives in California, said he learned of his brother's death when one of Dominguez' friends sent him a

direct message on Facebook.

"(The friend) was like, 'Hey, this isn't a joke,'" Raphael said. "I need one of you guys to answer me. Your brother is dead."

In the 911 call, Dominguez said he didn't have any family. Raphael said in a phone interview with the O'Colly that he and Dominguez grew up in foster care in California and were constantly separated. Raphael said Dominguez had moved to Stillwater from Texas about six months ago and was unemployed.

Raphael said he knew Dominguez struggled with depression and alcoholism, but the brothers kept in touch, and Raphael had told Dominguez he was always going to be there for him.

"I watched the dashcam footage," Raphael said. "I listened to his call. He was literally asking for help. It was a call for help."

About a week before the shooting, Raphael said he told Dominguez to call him if he had any problems, and Dominguez said he would. Raphael said there's no explanation for the officers' use of force.

"I want answers," Raphael said. "All he was going to do was go home. I feel like the officers maybe literally had something against him. He had a problem with authority figures, like officers, but still if he would cooperate, why not a Taser? Why not other options? Why the gun?"

Raphael said he believed his brother might have "said something officers didn't like" when they were called to check on his welfare six days earlier.

SPD said it had contacted Dominguez only once before his shooting. Officers took Dominguez into protective custody for a medical evaluation March 19 after an unidentified caller told police Dominguez was having "suicidal ideations," according to an SPD press release.

But records the O'Colly obtained from SPD showed an unidentified person called in a welfare check on Dominguez on March 22 because he "did not show up for his appointment." Dispatchers contacted Dominguez, and he told them he had overslept. The report does not detail any interaction between Dominguez and officers.

In the 911 call, Dominguez said he had a gun, but Raphael said he didn't think his brother had a real gun. He said he knew Dominguez owned a BB gun but did not have any carbon dioxide cartridges.

Raphael also said Dominguez had been cutting himself, but a woman he was "talking to" had taken his knife.

Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation declined to comment on what weapons were recovered from the scene.

Casteel and Meridith were placed on paid administrative leave for about two weeks until OSBI finished the criminal investigation.

The officers were not identified until Thursday, when prosecutors of the Payne County District Attorney's Office determined the shooting was justified and the SPD administrative investigation was completed, according to an SPD press release. The officers returned to work earlier this week, SPD Capt. Kyle Gibbs said.

"I just want (the officers) to know, like, that was wrong," Raphael said. "I'm sure if they had a family member and somebody shot them, they wouldn't be happy."

'Why not other options? Why the gun?'

In the days following the shooting, citizens voiced criticism on social media:

Stillwater PD has had this man laying in the street for an hour now. —CHUN-LI (@TheHighrolla) March 29, 2018

Tragic. I'm heart broken for his family. Waiting for the name to be released. Wonder how it would have played out if the cops had not pulled their guns. —Laura Hedrick (@Waterdancer99) March 29, 2018 +6 Stillwater News Press/Facebook +6 Stillwater News Press/Facebook

Dominguez told dispatchers he was suicidal, and many social media comments referred to his death as "suicide by cop."

Geoffrey Alpert, a criminology and criminal justice professor at the University of South Carolina, said "suicide by cop" is a "slang, unofficial term."

Alpert has studied high-risk police activities for more than 25 years, including police use of force, officer decision-making and the effectiveness of less-lethal technology available to police.

"Suicide by cop" is a term based on perception, Alpert said, because "you really don't know." He said shootings can

have the components of a "suicide by cop" situation, in which a desperate person purposefully draws a lethal reaction from police, but "to put a label on it like that is much more unofficial."

Alpert said police officers' use of force should depend on the threat level they encounter in a situation. He said officers generally do not want to kill or injure someone, but they have to act to protect their own lives. +6 Kelsy Schlotthauer/O'Colly

Before March 28, the latest officer-involved shooting in Stillwater was Jan. 29, 2015, when Sgt. Cody Manuel shot and killed Ralph Willis, a murder suspect.

Manuel has been a police officer for 13 years. In an interview with the O'Colly this week, he said police officers have to deal with people who are "at their worst." In these "ugly" situations, he said he hopes people listen to facts rather than their emotions.

"It's easy to say, 'I don't feel like this was justified,'" Manuel said. "But it's harder to look at all the facts and make that determination."

Alpert and Manuel said aiming to only wound an individual who is armed, or whom officers perceive to be armed, is unrealistic; officers must aim for the torso.

"Shooting in the leg. ... That's movie stuff," Alpert said. "If you are in a situation where your life could be at risk, you've got to shoot at the largest target. Shooting the gun out of your hand, that's TV-Western. That's not reality."

Manuel said officers are trained to use their weapons as a last resort to stop undesired actions, and the torso is the most effective area, other than the head, to do so. A person's arms and legs are likely to move, and shooting moving targets is "incredibly hard."

Officers are held accountable for every bullet that leaves their guns, Manuel said.

"None of us want to shoot an innocent bystander," Manuel said. "To take the chance of trying to shoot somebody in the leg and lose that round to go on to God knows where, that's unacceptable."

As for less-lethal technology, such as Tasers, Alpert said their use also depends on the situation. Tasers can be unreliable, Alpert said, because there are many factors that determine their success, such as whether officers are close enough to their target or whether the individual is wearing light enough clothing for the prongs to penetrate. Alpert said lone officers typically don't use their Tasers in high-risk situations because if they don't work, then "You're dead." But in a situation with multiple officers, Alpert said officers often split, one officer presenting non-lethal force and another officer providing lethal cover.

"(The Supreme Court of the United States) has said you don't look at this in 20/20 hindsight, and you don't," Alpert said, referring to the 1989 decision in *Graham v. Connor*. "You have to look at it as a forward, in-progress, tense, rapidly evolving situation."

As for leaving Dominguez' body in the road for more than an hour, Alpert said that's often not the police department's decision, as it depends on the availability of the coroner and the investigating agency.

"You've got to understand there are a lot of pushes and pulls," Alpert said. "But, absolutely, you want to get a body out of there as soon as possible because it's insulting to the family."

'A rock in a still pond'

Nationally, law enforcement officers shot and killed about 1,000 people in 2017, according to The Washington Post's database. Of those, about 25 percent were reportedly mentally ill. In Oklahoma, police shot and killed 26 people in 2017, six of whom were reportedly mentally ill. Only one was unarmed. +6 Kelsy Schlotthauer/O'Colly Data from The Washington Post's "Fatal Force" database

Alpert said mental illness adds a level of complexity to situations officers respond to. Officers can be trained in "Mental Health 101," but it's unrealistic to think they could be trained as mental health professionals, Alpert said.

"We expect so much of our police officers, and now we want to make them mental health providers," Alpert said.

"We forget what we pay these men and women, you know, and it's not a lot when we're asking so much from them."

Mike Brose, chief executive officer of the Mental Health Association of Oklahoma, said the mental health training available to officers is "still woefully inadequate" compared to other training they receive. In police training

nationally, a “great deal more time” is spent on use of tactics than is spent on soft skills and how to interact with people, Brose said.

Brose said the lack of training is unfair to officers who respond to mental health crisis events.

“They have a difficult job,” Brose said. “It’d be hard for the best mental health professional I know to handle some of these situations.”

There might be a solution.

This year in Tulsa, for two days a week, a community response team will be available to respond to calls for service that involve people in mental health crises.

The three-person team is composed of a police officer from the Tulsa Police Department, a firefighter/EMT from the Tulsa Fire Department and a licensed mental health professional from Family and Children’s Services, a behavioral healthcare and family services provider in Tulsa.

“You got the best of both worlds working together as a team,” Brose said.

The EMT takes care of medical interventions, the police officer ensures the safety of everyone involved and the mental health professional interacts with the individual, Brose said.

Brose said the pilot program is modeled after similar teams in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and San Antonio, where

Brose said “amazing” data shows reduction in the use of deadly force. Brose said the Tulsa team is meant to reduce tension on calls involving people suffering from mental illness, but it can risk only so much when it comes to safety. +6 Kelsy Schlotthauer/O’Colly Data from The Washington Post’s “Fatal Force database

“When a firearm or weapon comes out, all bets are off,” Brose said. “Law enforcement has a clear and mandated legal right to protect themselves and the public surrounding them.”

Brose said he respects officers have to “think fast” and react quickly in certain situations, but police departments need to encourage healthy assessments of the use of deadly force, especially when they involve people identified as having a serious mental health issue.

“It’s a rock in a still pond,” Brose said. “And the reverberations are going in every direction for a lifetime, multiple lifetimes, affecting so many people.”

## DETAILS

<b>Subject:</b>	Social networks; Shootings; Criminal investigations; Mental health care; Firearms; Mental disorders
<b>Location:</b>	Colorado California Oklahoma
<b>Publication title:</b>	University Wire; Carlsbad
<b>Publication year:</b>	2018
<b>Publication date:</b>	Apr 15, 2018
<b>Section:</b>	News
<b>Publisher:</b>	Uloop, Inc.
<b>Place of publication:</b>	Carlsbad
<b>Country of publication:</b>	United States, Carlsbad
<b>Publication subject:</b>	General Interest Periodicals--United States

<b>Source type:</b>	Newspapers
<b>Language of publication:</b>	English
<b>Document type:</b>	News
<b>ProQuest document ID:</b>	2025149600
<b>Document URL:</b>	<a href="https://search.proquest.com/docview/2025149600?accountid=14026">https://search.proquest.com/docview/2025149600?accountid=14026</a>
<b>Copyright:</b>	© 2018 UWIRE, a division of Uloop
<b>Last updated:</b>	2018-04-15
<b>Database:</b>	Global Newsstream

## LINKS

[Check SFX for Availability](#)

---

Database copyright © 2019 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.

[Terms and Conditions](#) [Contact ProQuest](#)