

UPDATED: Bemidji Police Chief cautions against rumors, misinformation in fatal shooting case

Shearer, Jordan . TCA Regional News ; Chicago [Chicago]14 Dec 2018.

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FULL TEXT

Dec. 14--BEMIDJI – Police Chief Mike Mastin cautioned Friday against the spread of misinformation and reiterated the need for a thorough investigation following the recent officer-involved shooting death of Vernon May.

The shooting has caused significant backlash throughout the community, a demand for transparency from the police department and Beltrami County Sheriff's Office, as well as a slew of rumors about what actually happened during the traffic stop that resulted May's death.

"It is important that people not promote a false narrative that spreads hate throughout our community," Mastin said in a press release issued Friday afternoon. "Doing so does not allow our community to heal and move forward."

In addition to warning against misinformation, Mastin reiterated the fact that the investigation will take time to complete.

The Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension is investigating the shooting, and once that is complete, it will turn over its findings to the Beltrami County Attorney's Office.

There is at least some video footage of the incident, and Mastin clarified in his release that the recording will be made available at some point. At the same time, he cautioned that releasing the footage too soon after the fact could have negative ramifications.

"By releasing the video too soon, there is the risk of tainting a jury that may be required for a trial or grand jury," Mastin wrote. "I assure you that the body camera worn by the Bemidji Police Officer in this case will be made public."

In addition to the Bemidji police officer, a Beltrami County sheriff's deputy also was at the scene and fired his weapon during the incident. The Beltrami County Sheriff's Office could not be immediately reached for any kind of similar statement, and Mastin did not reference whether or not there would be a similar release of video footage from the deputy's body camera or squad vehicle.

May, 34, of Red Lake, died late on Wednesday, Nov. 28, during a traffic stop at the intersection of Ridgeway Avenue Northwest and 30th Street, which is near the Paul Bunyan Mall.

According to the original press release about the shooting, Bemidji Police Officer Bidal Duran initiated the traffic stop, and Beltrami County Sheriff's Deputy Brandon Newhouse arrived shortly thereafter. May, who was in the back seat of the vehicle, was asked to get out since he had a felony warrant. Both Duran and Newhouse noticed May had a handgun, and Duran and May subsequently began to struggle for control of the weapon, according to the release. Sometime after that, both Duran and Newhouse fired their weapons, which resulted in May's death. May's death has prompted multiple protests at the Law Enforcement Center in downtown Bemidji. The most recent protest was scheduled for Friday afternoon. However, the protest had been planned in advance before Mastin's statement was released.

Here's the full text of Mastin's release:

"Our community has experienced a tragedy. One life is lost and others are irreversibly changed forever. Their families and friends have also suffered a great deal of grief, anger and worry. Understandably, everyone wants answers as to what happened on the night of November 28th.

"I recognize that people want the details of this case to be made public immediately, I do too. However, it is important we all understand, a case of this significance takes time and due diligence to ensure nothing is missed. It is also important to recognize that immediately after this incident the Bemidji Police Department requested an independent investigation by a premier investigative agency, the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension. This agency must review all of the evidence it has collected including, but not limited to; interviews, videos, physical evidence, autopsy and toxicology reports. Each of these items take time for proper analysis.

"Once the BCA investigation is complete it will be forwarded to the Beltrami County Attorney's Office for review.

"There have been untruthful rumors spread across this community and social media by people who do not have facts related to this case. It is important that people not promote a false narrative that spreads hate throughout our community. Doing so does not allow our community to heal and move forward. In fact, it only serves to create further division and destroy the bridges of trust we have already built.

"There has been demand for immediate release of the video. I assure you that the body camera worn by the Bemidji Police Officer in this case will be made public. However, we must consider several important details. By releasing the video too soon, there is the risk of tainting a jury that may be required for a trial or grand jury. And, we are considering the family of the deceased, once the video is made public it will be shared across all media platforms.

"The Bemidji Police Department believes strongly in building the resilience and strength of the Bemidji Community through transparency and inclusion. It is imperative that we exercise patience and allow for a complete and thorough investigation. Together, we all seek the truth."

– Chief Mastin

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DETAILS

Subject:	Cameras; False information; Police; Criminal investigations; Camcorders; Gossip
Location:	Minnesota
Publication title:	TCA Regional News; Chicago
Publication year:	2018
Publication date:	Dec 14, 2018
Publisher:	Tribune Content Agency LLC
Place of publication:	Chicago
Country of publication:	United States, Chicago
Publication subject:	Business And Economics
Source type:	Wire Feeds
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	News

ProQuest document ID: 2156245388

Document URL: <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2156245388?accountid=14026>

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Last updated: 2018-12-14

Database: Global Newsstream

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