

ACLU-Rhode Island Issues Statement on Fatal - Targeted News Service (USA) - September 10, 2018

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PROVIDENCE, Rhode Island, Sept. 10 -- The American Civil Liberties Union of Rhode Island issued the following statement by Executive Director Steven Brown on the fatal shooting of **DaShawn Cole** by Pawtucket police:

"It has been more than 72 hours since **DaShawn Cole** was killed by Pawtucket police, yet very basic information about this tragic incident remains undisclosed. The names of the officers, how many shots were fired, the threat faced by the police at the time, even whether the victim fired any shots himself -- all of this remains unknown. We assume - we hope - that this and related information will be released shortly, but the contrast between the belated sharing of information by police during officer-involved shootings and the much more free-flowing disclosure of information when serious civilian-upon-civilian crimes occur remains striking and totally unacceptable. In fact, similar secrecy disconcertingly shrouded the last fatal police shooting in Pawtucket in 2016.(1)

"Friday's deadly shooting warrants consideration for another important reason. According to published accounts, there have been 14 incidents of deadly police shootings in Rhode Island since 2006. Of those 14 deaths, seven of them - one-half - have been at the hands of one police department: Pawtucket. This is a truly alarming figure.(2) By contrast, Providence, which has a population more than two times as large as Pawtucket and a higher crime rate overall, has had two fatal shootings by police in the same time period.

"While this figure is disturbing, we want to emphasize that we make no judgement on the actions police took on Friday. Indeed, we don't have enough information for that. However, it cannot be denied that Pawtucket police are far more likely to use deadly force than other police departments.

"The ACLU fully recognizes the dangers police face daily, and that every police shooting must be individually evaluated on its own merits and in recognition of the split-second decisions that officers must often make. However, when one department protecting a city whose population makes up about 7 percent of the state's population is nonetheless responsible for half of the fatal police shootings in the past decade, both internal and external investigations of this troubling fact are clearly warranted.

"The ACLU calls on the Attorney General and the Police Chief to conduct a thorough review of the Pawtucket Police Department's training and practices to determine the causes behind this disconcerting track record. Just as importantly, we call on all police departments to be more forthcoming with basic information about police shootings when they occur, rather than shrouding them in secrecy for lengthy periods of time. The formulaic silence by law enforcement that routinely follows these shootings promotes a double standard that can only breed mistrust and suspicion."

Footnotes:

(1) Providence Journal, "Information Lacking in Pawtucket Police Shooting of 24 Year Old Man," Amanda Milkovits, April 25, 2016.

(2) A Providence Journal article from 2016 documented 16 fatal police shootings in the state going back to 2001, and there appear to have been three more, including Friday's death, since then. Taking that longer view, Pawtucket police are still responsible for more than one-third of all fatal police shootings in the state. Providence Journal, "RI Police Officers Involved in 16 Fatal Incidents in Last 15 Years," Amanda Milkovits, March 28, 2016.

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