

Grand Rapids Police Officer Released on Bail After Being Indicted for the Killing of Patrick Lyoya

Community outrage mounts calling for the white officer to be re-arrested

By [Abayomi Azikiwe](#)

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Patrick Lyoya, 26, an African immigrant from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), was shot in the back of the head by patrolman Christopher Schurr on April 4.

This act of police violence was met with widespread shock and mass demonstrations demanding that Schurr be terminated from the Grand Rapids police department and charged with murder.

There was an announcement made on June 15 saying that Schurr had been fired from the Grand Rapid Police Department. This came less than a week after his indictment on second degree murder charges in the death of Lyoya.

Despite the national attention focusing on the killing of Lyoya, it would take more than two months for Schurr to be indicted for second degree murder. A Kent County judge presiding over the hearing set the \$100,000 cash bond which was posted on June 10.

The defense attorney for Officer Schurr, Mark Dodge, stated that the policeman was justified in the firing of a single point-blank range shot into the back of the head of Lyoya. Schurr pleaded not guilty and was allowed to go home. Dodge argued that Schurr was not a flight risk and therefore should have been released pending the outcome of the trial.

Schurr was not charged for felony firearms violations since he is a police officer. Kent County Prosecutor Chris Becker said that Schurr could not be charged with firearm felonies because of a previous Michigan Supreme Court decision, *People v. Khoury*. The ruling essentially absolves the police for crimes committed with their weapons even if it results in the death of civilians.

Nonetheless, many people who have watched the video of the incident feel very strongly that the shooting was clearly unjustified. Lyoya was attempting to flee the scene after a traffic stop. He was not armed and therefore posed no real threat to the officer or others in

the vicinity.

After the shooting and the advent of antiracist demonstrations in Grand Rapids, Schurr was placed on paid administrative leave. He was subjected to a review by the police department to determine whether his actions warranted termination. His firing was a direct outcome of the international exposure related to the killing of Lyoya and the protests by people in Grand Rapids.

Several activists in Grand Rapids had requested that the case be turned over to Michigan **Attorney General Dana Nessel** because the Kent County Prosecutor **Chris Becker** was too close politically to the police department. It is very rare in the United States for white law-enforcement officers to be indicted in the killing of African Americans and other people of color.

Grand Rapids City Manager **Mark Washington**, who is African American, faced a demonstration outside his home just hours after Schurr was released on bail. The activists insisted that justice had not been carried out considering the severity of the crime committed against Lyoya.

An article published by WOOD Television in Grand Rapids [quoted Washington as saying](#):

“These types of tactics and attempts to harass and intimidate will not be tolerated nor will bullying impact my judgement in carrying out my duties as City Manager. As was discussed during Thursday’s press conference, I suspended Officer Schurr without pay on Friday pending his termination hearing which is scheduled to take place this coming Thursday. I made that decision because I believe it was the right thing and not because of the obnoxious tactics of a handful of confrontational activists who tried to intimidate me and my family into action.”

National Pattern of Continuing and Escalating Police Violence

Yet the aggressive tactics utilized by the Grand Rapids police over the years has endangered the health and well-being of the community. This pattern is national where the police killings of civilians has not lessened since the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Hakim Littleton, among others since 2020.

So far in 2022, 243 people have reportedly been killed in interactions with the police. These figures are collected by media agencies and independent groups since law-enforcement routinely refuses to supply statistics on the number of people they injure or kill. (See [this](#))

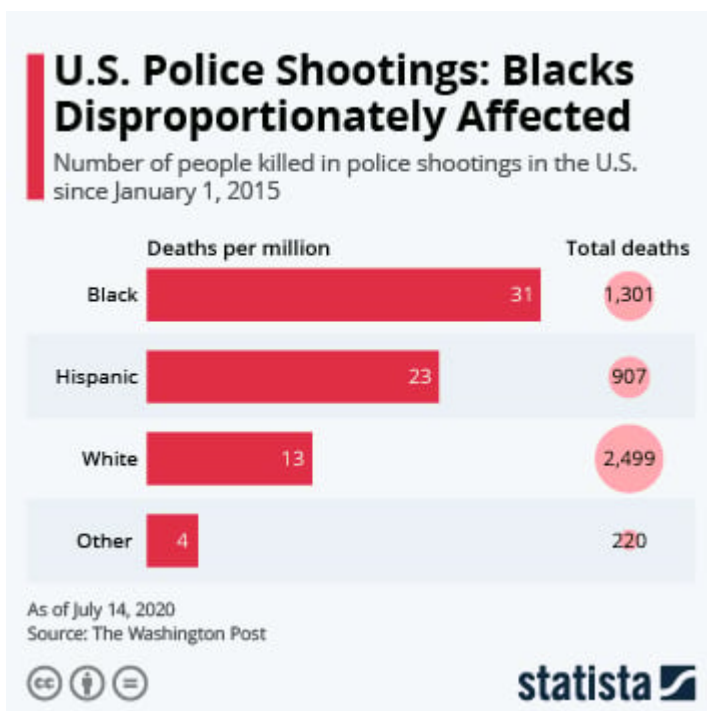
On municipal, state and national levels the funding for law-enforcement has actually increased despite the demands by various antiracists and other organizations calling for the defunding of the police. The current U.S. **President Joe Biden** reiterated during the State of the Union Address earlier in the year that his objective was not to defund the police. Quite to the contrary, the Biden administration has funneled more federal funding to police agencies by utilizing money allocated for COVID-19 pandemic relief.

These funds from the Cares Act and the American Rescue Plan (ARP) should be used exclusively to assist working families in their day-to-day struggles against inflation and the overall declining standard of living. The rise in domestic violence, street crime and other forms of illegal activities can be traced directly to the increasing uncertainty within the national economy. There is no scientific proof that the recruitment of police officers and the

increase in their funding has any positive impact on reducing criminal activity. Even with the bolstering of law-enforcement agencies around the U.S., mass shootings are on the incline.

During 2021, there were 693 mass shootings in the U.S. These incidents are defined by four or more people being shot, indicating that 2021's total is 13.4 percent higher than 2020. These mass shootings claimed 702 lives in 2021 with 2,844 people being injured.

Although mass shootings in 2021 in Boulder, Colorado, supermarket shooting; the metro Atlanta spa killings; and the San Jose transit shooting were given widespread attention by the press, most of the mass shootings disproportionately impact Black and Brown peoples and unfortunately are receiving relatively little attention from the corporate and governmental-controlled media outlets. For more information see The Trace website. (See [this](#))



Police kill African Americans disproportionately (Source: Statista)

In 2022 so far, not even halfway through the entire year, approximately 250 mass shootings have occurred. The most noted and egregious involved the murder of 10 African Americans at a supermarket in Buffalo and the killing of 21 people, 19 of them being children, at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas.

[Another article](#) on the Schurr case published by the Iosco County News Herald reports on the view of activists seeking justice for the Lyoya family:

“‘He’s just been charged, not convicted,’ said LaDonna Norma, the co-founder of Together We Are Safe, a grassroots group that works to address issues around policing and housing in Grand Rapids. ‘It’s clear as day that the system is protecting this man, and they have from day one. If at any given time, he feels like his life is over, he can go out and go postal. And then I bet people would still protect him,’ said Norma.”

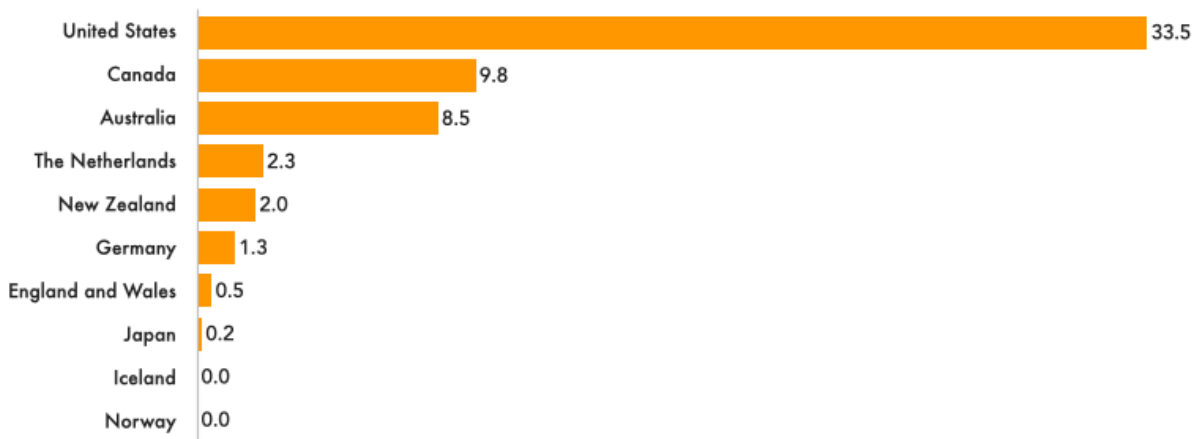
Defunding and Restructuring of Police Services Remain Imperative

Demands

There is no way around the necessity of restructuring law-enforcement in the U.S. in light of the police killings of civilians and the proliferation of mass shootings. In the Uvalde case, police refused to take action against an active shooter even though there were numerous calls by children to the emergency first responders requesting immediate assistance.

U.S. POLICE KILL CIVILIANS AT A MUCH HIGHER RATE THAN POLICE IN OTHER WEALTHY COUNTRIES

Number of people killed by law enforcement per 10 million population in the most recent year with available data



US police killings far surpass those in other capitalist states (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)

Law-enforcement agencies are considered sacrosanct by the ruling class inside the U.S. where the gap between the wealthy and the working class is consistently increasing. African Americans have been targets of police violence since the earliest days of the colonial and antebellum periods of U.S. history when between 1619 and 1865, millions of people were subjected to chattel slavery and the forced removal from lands coveted by the Europeans.

After the conclusion of the Civil War (1861-1865), law-enforcement agencies were utilized in the institutionalization of Jim Crow segregation and the criminalization of successive generations of oppressed peoples. The ascendancy of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements during the post-World War II period witnessed the further militarization of the police through federal funding mechanisms such as the Law-Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) during the late 1960s.

Then there was the exponential growth within the prison system which increased the population of inmates by 500% since the 1980s. Those held in U.S. detention centers, jails and prisons are disproportionately Black and Brown peoples.

The demands for defunding of police are being made amid the worsening plight of growing numbers of African Americans, Latin Americans and other people of color communities suffering from rising costs for food, fuel, housing and other commodities. Consequently, a comprehensive social and political program is needed to link the problems of police violence with the overall necessity of transforming U.S. society into a just, equal and self-determined existence.

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