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What it's like when the cops kill your son

D.C. police shot Marquese two years ago. They still won't say why.



Kenithia Alston is still looking for answers in the police shooting of her son Marquese Alston in June 2018.

By **Kenithia Alston**

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Here is what it's like to have the police kill your son. One evening, you get a call from a friend on the scene at the time, saying that your 22-year-old son, Marquese Alston, has been shot. No one from the police department contacts you until the next day, when officers show up at your door. They tell you that your son has been involved in an “incident” and extend their condolences — though they do not say he has been killed — and then hand you a business card for a sergeant at internal affairs and a printout with contact information for the District’s Medical Examiner’s Office.



Kenithia Alston is the mother of Marquese Alston.

By

now, you know your son is dead; you know, from the phone calls of friends

and family who have seen the news on TV, that the police encountered him in an alley, chased him and then shot him multiple times in broad daylight.

You try to get answers. Why did the police approach your son to begin with? Why did they fire at him so many times? The police keep changing their story in public statements: Officers approached him **because he was acting suspiciously**; no, they chased him **after he reached into his waistband**. They shot him because he **drew a gun**; no, they shot him after he **shot at them first**. (Contacted by a Washington Post editor, the D.C. police declined to comment for this story, pointing to ongoing litigation.)

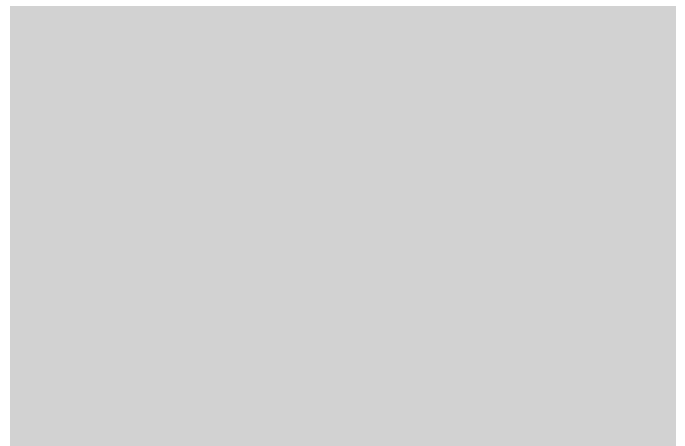
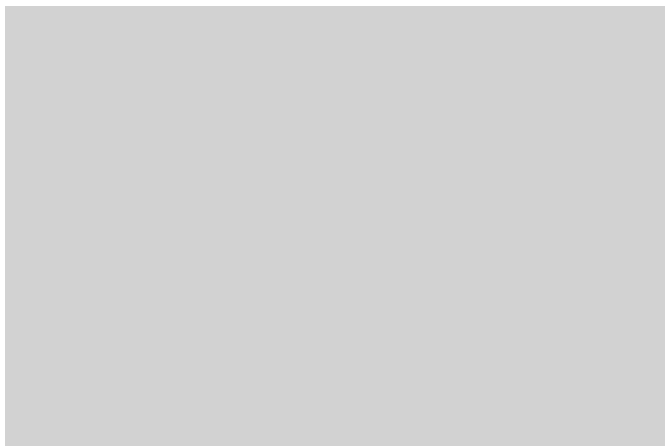


Kenithia Alston prays during a protest against police brutality on June 8 at D.C. Superior Court. (Katherine Frey/The Washington Post)

You ask for the footage from their body cameras, but they refuse. They tell you Markeese was an adult, and even though he's dead, he's the only one who has the [right to see the footage](#). You ask for the results of their investigation; they tell you it's underway, and they can't release anything until it's complete.

So you wait two months, then six; then 12, then 18; still no investigation report. You keep pushing to see the body cam video; they [keep refusing](#).

Finally, after pressure from local [elected officials](#), the police give in a little. They require you to come into their precinct with only three people with you for support. You bring your lawyers and Marqueeese's brother, and they sit you in a room with an officer who plays a chopped-up and edited version of the footage. It tells you nothing. You ask for the full raw footage. They say no. You ask for the report on their investigation. They say it's still not done. You ask just for the names of the officers who shot him. They say no. So now, two years have gone by, your son is still dead, and the police still won't tell you why. They [announce](#) that they've cleared the officers involved but have yet to release their findings or give you any of the materials you requested.



LEFT: For two years, Alston has asked to see police body camera footage of the incident that led to her son's death. D.C. police have allowed her to watch a few minutes of footage, which Alston said was

edited. RIGHT: D.C. police have offered different descriptions of their 2018 encounter with Marquese Alston, 22. The officers involved in his shooting have been cleared.

Yet while the police know how to keep silent about their own, they are always quick to dredge up their victim's past, [pointing reporters to his robbery conviction](#), as if a previous brush with the law justifies killing someone. And through all this, they still protect the identities of those who killed him.

The truth is, like so many young men, black or white, rich or poor, Marquese was just starting to make his way in the world. He had a young daughter, Lyric, whom he adored, a family that loved him, and a community that has seen far too many of its sons and daughters brutalized and killed by the police. To us, Marquese's life mattered; it still does.

This month, in the wake of George Floyd's and Breonna Taylor's deaths and nationwide protests demanding change, D.C. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser painted "Black Lives Matter" across two city blocks to demonstrate her support for black communities. Symbols can be powerful, but without actions they are meaningless. If the

mayor truly believes that black lives matter, for two years she had a chance to prove it to me when all I asked for was the truth about how and why the police killed my son. Now I've brought a wrongful-death lawsuit against the District in federal court.

I am done waiting; I am done being satisfied with symbolic gestures. The nation has been moved by protests demanding justice. That's all I want for my son.



Kenithia Alston created a book of photos of her son as a keepsake for his daughter, Lyric, who was 2 at the time of his death. (Bill O'Leary/The Washington Post)

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