

Fight unarmed police shootings

Written by Judge Greg Mathis
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On August 24, 23-year-old Mark Anthony Barmore was shot and killed – in front of a group of children, by two Rockford, IL police officers. Barmore was wanted for questioning in a domestic dispute and, attempting to avoid police, attempted to hide in a preschool housed within a church. Police say Barmore went after one of the officer's weapons but witnesses, including the pastor's wife and teenaged daughter, say Barmore surrendered with his hands up.

The shooting has created tension between the police and residents in Rockford, and with good reason. The officers not only shot an unarmed man, they did so in the presence of children, putting young lives in jeopardy. An independent investigation into the shooting has begun but the Rockford police department must do more. And residents have to lead the way.

Police shootings of unarmed suspects is nothing new. In 1999, New York City police officers mistook Amadou Diallo's wallet for a gun and fired 41 shots, killing him. In April 2001, 19-year-old Timothy Thomas, who was wanted for traffic violations, was shot and killed by a Cincinnati police officer. And in, 2006, 23-year-old Sean Bell was shot by the NYPD the day before his wedding. All of the officers were acquitted of criminal charges.

Law enforcement officers are constantly facing danger; we want to honor the good work that they do. But the pressure of the job does not and should not justify the use of unnecessary force. In the Barmore case, an unarmed man was shot and killed in front of children. Not only were the lives of these very young people put into jeopardy, they will also now bear the emotional scars that come with witnessing a murder.

The citizens of Rockford must raise their voices in protest: for both the censure of the officers and also for training within the police department. Opening fire where there are children present, when the suspect posed no threat to the children was uncalled for. And the officers should be reprimanded accordingly.

Rockford residents should not let this story die down. By taking a stand in their community and keeping the pressure on the police department and city government, citizens could impact the way the department operates. If change happens there, they can then spur change in police departments around the country.

Judge Greg Mathis became the youngest judge in Michigan's history and was elected a Superior Court Judge for Michigan's 36th District. He has been called upon as a regular contributor to national television programs, including "Larry King Live," "Politically Incorrect," CNN's "Talk Back Live," "Showbiz Tonight" and "Extra" to discuss his opinions on complex issues of the day, such as national security, unique sentencing, affirmative action and celebrity scandals. He also offers his take on high-profile legal cases.