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7 Deputies Placed on Leave After Fatal Shooting of Black Man in North Carolina

Gov. Roy Cooper on Friday joined growing calls for the release of body-camera footage of the fatal shooting of Andrew Brown Jr. in Elizabeth.



Demonstrators in Elizabeth City, N.C., demanded the release of deputies' body-camera footage of the fatal shooting of Andrew Brown Jr.

By Michael Levenson

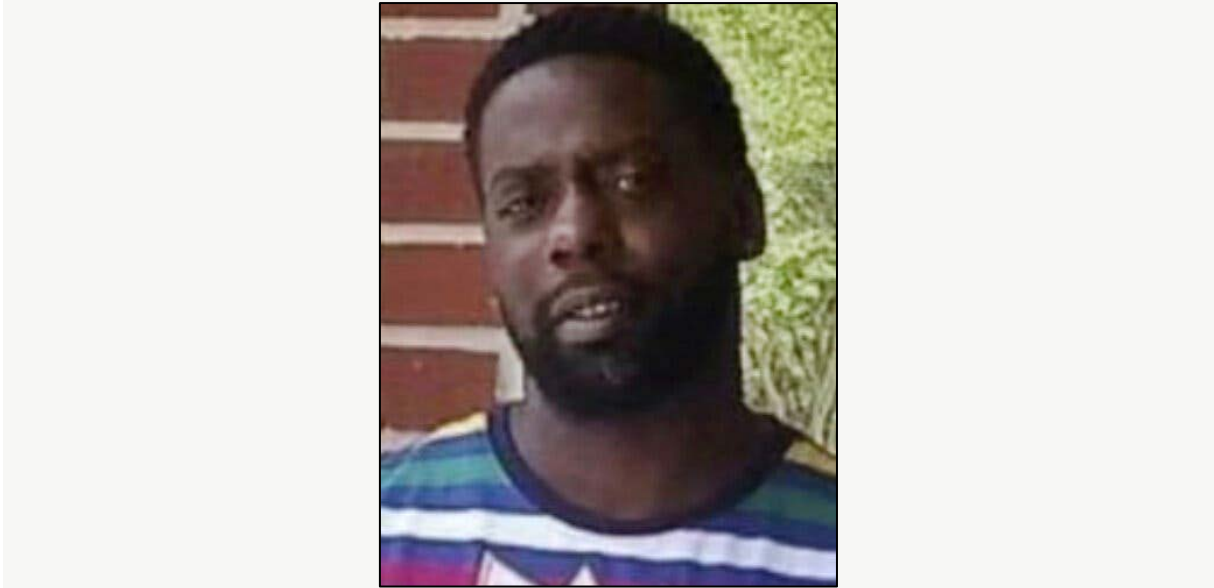
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Seven sheriff's deputies have been placed on leave, and the governor of North Carolina is calling for the release of body-camera footage after deputies shot and killed a Black man on Wednesday, the authorities said.

Maj. Aaron Wallio of the Pasquotank County Sheriff's Office, which has 55 full-time deputies, confirmed on Friday that seven of them had been placed on paid administrative leave after the killing of Andrew Brown Jr. in Elizabeth City.

Two other deputies have resigned and one has retired since the shooting, although those three departures were unrelated to the killing of Mr. Brown, Major Wallio said.

The sheriff's office has said that the local version of a SWAT team, as well as deputies from another agency, were executing a search warrant and an arrest warrant on felony drug charges when Mr. Brown was shot. Major Wallio said that "more than one" deputy had fired shots, but he declined to elaborate.



Andrew Brown Jr.

The office has not further described the circumstances surrounding the shooting or said whether Mr. Brown was armed.



A bullet fired during deputies' encounter with Mr. Brown pierced a neighbor's home.

The fatal shooting, one day after a jury had found a former Minneapolis police officer guilty of murder in the death of George Floyd, has touched off protests and outrage in Elizabeth City, a city of about 17,000 people, about 45 miles south of Norfolk, Va.

Tommy Wooten II, the Pasquotank County sheriff, has said that the deputies were wearing body cameras and that the cameras were active at the time. He said the footage had been turned over to the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation and could be released only by a judge.

“What I will say is that if evidence shows that any of my deputies violate the law or policies, they will be held accountable,” Sheriff Wooten said earlier this week.

On Friday, Gov. Roy Cooper, a Democrat, said the body-camera footage should be released.

“Initial reports of the shooting in Elizabeth City and death of Andrew Brown, Jr. this week are tragic and extremely concerning,” Mr. Cooper wrote on Twitter. “The body camera footage should be made public as quickly as possible and the S.B.I. should investigate thoroughly to ensure accountability.”

The Elizabeth City Council voted unanimously on Friday to send a letter to the sheriff, the district attorney and the State Bureau of Investigation asking that the body-camera footage be released. If the request is denied, the measure calls for the Council to petition a court to release the footage.

Keith Rivers, a local N.A.A.C.P. leader, called the release of the body-camera footage “a must to build the transparency that is needed in our community.”

Andrew Womble, the Pasquotank County district attorney, said on Wednesday that he had asked the State Bureau of Investigation to take primary responsibility for the inquiry.

“What we are looking for at this time will be accurate answers and not fast answers,” Mr. Womble said. “This will not be a rush to judgment. We’re going to wait for that investigation, as we’re duty bound to do.”

Harry Daniels, a lawyer for Mr. Brown’s family, said that based on witnesses’ statements, it appeared that Mr. Brown had been shot while driving away from sheriff’s deputies.

“To my understanding, Mr. Brown was not armed, and the bullets entered into the back of the vehicle,” Mr. Daniels said at a news conference on Thursday.

Mr. Daniels said that Mr. Brown, 42, had been a father of seven.

“Why did they have to shoot him and to shoot to kill, at that?” an aunt, Clarissa Gibson, said on Wednesday. “Why couldn’t they shoot him in the leg or something?”

On Friday, Mr. Daniels commended the governor for calling for the release of the footage. “We believe it’s going to show an unlawful killing of an unarmed Black man once again in this country,” Mr. Daniels said in an interview.

Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, said at a news briefing on Friday that President Biden was aware of the shooting.

Asked whether Mr. Biden believed the body-camera footage should be released, she said, "I've not talked to him about his particular view on that, and I believe he'd likely leave that up to law enforcement and others to work out."