



Clergy, labor leaders and supporters gather at the Cook County Administration Building on Thursday in Chicago to demand the resignation of Cook County State's Attorney Anita Alvarez before delivering 32,000 petition signatures calling for her to quit. | Rich Hein/Chicago Sun-Times, AP

More U.S. police charged with murder, manslaughter in 2015

By DON BABWIN
Associated Press

CHICAGO — The number of U.S. police officers charged with murder or manslaughter for on-duty shootings has tripled this year — a sharp increase that at least one expert says could be the result of more video evidence.

In the past, the annual average was fewer than five officers charged. In the final weeks of 2015, that number has climbed to 15, with 10 of the cases involving video.

"If you take the cases with the video away, you are left with what we would expect to see over the past 10 years — about five cases," said Philip Stinson, the Bowling Green State University criminologist who compiled the statistics from across the nation. "You have to wonder if there would have been charges if there wasn't video evidence."

The importance of video was highlighted last week with the release of footage showing a Chicago officer fatally shooting a teenager 16 times. The officer said he feared for his life from the teen, who was suspected of damaging cars using a small knife. He also had a powerful hallucinogen in his bloodstream.

"This had all the trappings of a life-threatening situation for a law-enforcement officer — PCP-laced juvenile who had been wreaking havoc on cars with a knife," said Joseph Tacopina, a prominent New York defense attorney and former prosecutor who has represented several police officers. "Except you have the video that shows a

straight-out execution."

When he was charged with first-degree murder last week, officer Jason Van Dyke became the 15th officer in the country to face such charges in 2015.

Over the last decade, law-enforcement agencies have recorded roughly 1,000 fatal shootings each year by on-duty police. An average of fewer than five each year resulted in murder or manslaughter charges against officers, Stinson found.

The cases are often difficult to prove. Of the 47 officers charged from the beginning of 2005 through the end of last year, about 23 percent were convicted, Stinson found.

"For forever, police have owned the narrative of what happened between any encounter between a police officer and a civilian," said David A. Harris, a University of Pittsburgh law professor who has written extensively on police misconduct. "What video does is it takes that power of the narrative away from the police to some extent. And that shift in power of control over the narrative is incredibly significant."

In case after case, that is exactly what has happened this year.

Stinson said Van Dyke would "never, ever" have been charged without the video. He said the same is true for Ray Tensing, the white University of Cincinnati police officer who is charged with murder and voluntary manslaughter in the July 19 death of Samuel DuBose, a black motorist whom Tensing shot to death after pulling him over for a missing front license plate. Tensing's attorney said

"You have to wonder if there would have been charges if there wasn't video evidence."

Philip Stinson, Bowling Green State University criminologist

the officer feared he would be dragged under the car as Dubose tried to drive away. But, Stinson said, the video from the officer's body camera shows that his explanation "doesn't add up."

Other cases around the country also reveal just how important the video is.

In Marksville, La., for example, two deputy city marshals were charged with second-degree murder after authorities reviewed video from one of the officers' body cameras, which showed a man with his hands in the air inside a vehicle when the marshals opened fire. The man was severely wounded and his 6-year-old autistic son killed.

Just how dramatically a video can shift the balance of power was apparent in North Charleston,

S.C., when officer Michael Slager shot and killed Walter Scott, an unarmed black man as he ran away after a traffic stop.

Slager told investigators that Scott had tried to grab his gun and Taser. But after a video from a cellphone showed Slager taking careful aim at Scott as he ran away and then picking up his Taser and dropping it near Scott's body, Slager was charged with murder.

"If not for the recording, I have no doubt that the officer in the Walter Scott case would be out on patrol today," Harris said.

Videos have also played a key role in cases in which the victims were, in fact, armed — something that Tacopina said typically brings to a halt any thought of charging officers.

{ REGION BRIEFS }

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FOX LAKE, ILL.

Gliniewicz funds to remain frozen until Monday

An order to release frozen funds to the widow of a northern Illinois police officer who authorities say killed himself after embezzling from a youth program will be approved next week.

The move was delayed after a Lake County judge in the case involving Melodie Gliniewicz had to leave the courthouse Thursday. An attorney declined to say how much will be released.

Authorities claim late Fox Lake Lt. Charles Joseph Gliniewicz staged his suicide to look like a homicide because he feared discovery of the embezzlement. The Lake County state's attorney's office froze several of his wife's personal bank accounts during a criminal investigation.

Melodie Gliniewicz hasn't been charged. Her attorneys argue prosecutors wrongly froze accounts and credit cards.

An earlier motion freed up about \$4,000 for her.

CHICAGO

Illinois school district OKs deal over locker room access

The U.S. Department of Education says a deal approved by a suburban Chicago school district allows a transgender student to use a girls' locker room and does not require her to use a privacy curtain, although the student has said she will do so.

The federal agency's view of the agreement appears to conflict with a statement released Wednesday by Township High School District 211 Superintendent Daniel Cates after a school board vote.

Cates' statement says the agreement pertains solely to the one transgender student and does not require a district-wide policy.

DARIEN, ILL.

Police: 1 injured in shooting at suburban Chicago Wal-Mart

Police say one person is injured after a shooting inside a suburban Chicago Wal-Mart store that appears to be an isolated incident.

Darien Police Deputy Chief John Cooper said in a Thursday statement that officers were dispatched to the Darien store around 5:30 p.m. for a call of shots fired in the store and found a victim with a gunshot wound to the shoulder. The victim was transported to a hospital.

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