

Crisis 911

Police Killings, Racial
Disparities, Behavioral
Health Crisis, and
Institutional Complicity
in Maryland

August 2026

ACLU
Maryland

Since 1931, the ACLU of Maryland has worked to defend and expand civil rights and civil liberties for all people in Maryland.

As the state affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union, we use the tools of litigation, legislative advocacy, and public education to hold government accountable and to ensure that the Constitution's promises of equality, liberty, and due process are realized in practice. Our work spans voting rights and democracy, racial justice and police accountability, immigrants' rights, LGBTQ+ rights, reproductive freedom, free speech, and the rights of people in the criminal legal system. We believe civil liberties and civil rights belong to everyone, and we don't back down from defending them.

Contents

Executive Summary	4
Credits and Acknowledgments	8
Dedication	10
Findings	13
Total Number	13
Persistent Racial Disparities	13
Deadly Force on Young Marylanders	14
Responding to Crisis Situations with Force	14
In Crisis, Unarmed, Fleeing, and Still Killed	14
Medical Examiner Findings Mask the Truth	15
Maryland's Crisis of Non-Accountability	15
Methodology	18
Scope and Definitions	19
Study Limitations	23
Roots of Police Violence in Maryland	24
Maryland's History of Racialized Violence and Medical Abuse	26
Today's System of Impunity for Police Violence	27
Shielding Violence: The Role of the Chief Medical Examiner	29
Protected by the Courts: How Prosecutors and Legal Doctrine Shield Police	31
Reforms and Resistance: The Path Towards Police Accountability	34
Recommendations and Policy Reflections	36
Reduce Unnecessary Police Encounters	39
Build Community-Rooted Safety Systems	39
Increase Public Safety Oversight, Transparency, and Accountability	39
Guarantee Families' Right to Information and Support	40
Areas for Further Research	41
The People Behind the Numbers	44
Endnotes	48

Executive Summary

One hundred and forty-three people were killed by police in Maryland between 2015 and 2023. This report documents who they were and how they died, and exposes a public safety and public health crisis rooted in systemic and institutional failures. The analysis draws on a comprehensive range of primary and secondary sources, including government reports, investigative databases, body-worn camera footage, court records, and witness statements, to analyze fatal police encounters during that timeframe and identify systemic patterns that inform our policy recommendations.

This report is comprised of two equal components: the narrative analysis that follows, and the searchable 2015-2023 Maryland Fatal Police Encounters Database, available on the ACLU of Maryland's

website at aclu-md.org/crisis-911/. The database is central to our commitment to transparency and to the community's demand for access to this information—it allows readers to find, sort, and filter information about each encounter and conduct their own analysis of the data.

The data reveal alarming patterns. **Despite making up only 32%¹ of Maryland's population, Black residents account for 64% of those killed by police (see Figure 1).** Nearly half (47%) of all victims showed signs of a behavioral health crisis or medical emergency at the time of their deaths. Yet, police and other agencies rarely take steps

to *learn* from these patterns to prevent future deaths, instead perpetuating the myth that nothing could be done differently to save lives. By focusing entirely on defending individual officers' actions as "justified," our systems perpetuate this myth. And our civil and criminal legal systems enable them: of the 143 fatal police encounters reported during this period, only one officer was criminally convicted for their role in these incidents.

Despite making up only 32% of Maryland's population, Black residents account for 64% of those killed by police.

Throughout the report, we profile three of these 143 individuals—Emanuel Oates, William Green, and Marcus Martin—who had loved ones, passions, and dreams, and whose lives were cut short by police violence. Their stories illuminate some of this report's most urgent themes: racial bias, mental health stigma, youth vulnerability, misclassification of deaths, and institutional impunity.

Here, we use the data to examine the biases and dehumanization that increase the likelihood of violent outcomes: at every data point, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) victims are drastically overrepresented. People experiencing behavioral health crises—regardless of race—were met with violence rather than support, revealing how those with mental health diagnoses are routinely made less safe in our communities. Our findings reveal a public health crisis rooted in a system that creates the conditions for fatal encounters in the first place—one that sends armed officers into crises that call for care, fails to truthfully document how police actions cause deaths, protects officers with violent histories, and relies on enforcement rather than investment in community health and safety. **Maryland must fully embrace policies and strategies that reduce the number of police interactions altogether, particularly for people in crisis.**

Key Findings:

- In Maryland, 143 people died during police encounters from 2015 through 2023.
- **Black people accounted for nearly two-thirds (64%) of victims in fatal police encounters. Overall, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color made up 71% of all victims.**
- Nearly half of Maryland's police killings (47%) involved someone killed while showing signs of a health crisis.
 - 24 people were killed in encounters that began with a call to the police that was explicitly seeking help for someone experiencing a medical emergency or behavioral health crisis, underscoring the urgent need for trained mental health professionals—not armed police officers—to respond in these situations.
- An alarming majority—**more than 8 in 10—of unarmed people killed in crisis situations were BIPOC**, highlighting a disturbing racial disparity in police uses of force.
- **Police killed more than 100 people who were either fleeing, in crisis, and/or unarmed. Of those, 24 unarmed people were killed while fleeing**, exposing the risk of violence to those trying to avoid police contact.
- **Six children (18 or younger) were killed. And nearly all (90%) of victims under age 21 were Black or Latine**, a horrifying finding revealing that the most extreme racial disparities in this entire report fall on our youngest Marylanders.
- **Zero officers were convicted for their actions while on-duty.** A single off-duty officer acting in a law enforcement capacity was convicted for killing two people.²

Maryland's systems have repeatedly failed to protect communities equitably, prioritizing defending law enforcement actions over learning how to improve the public's safety.

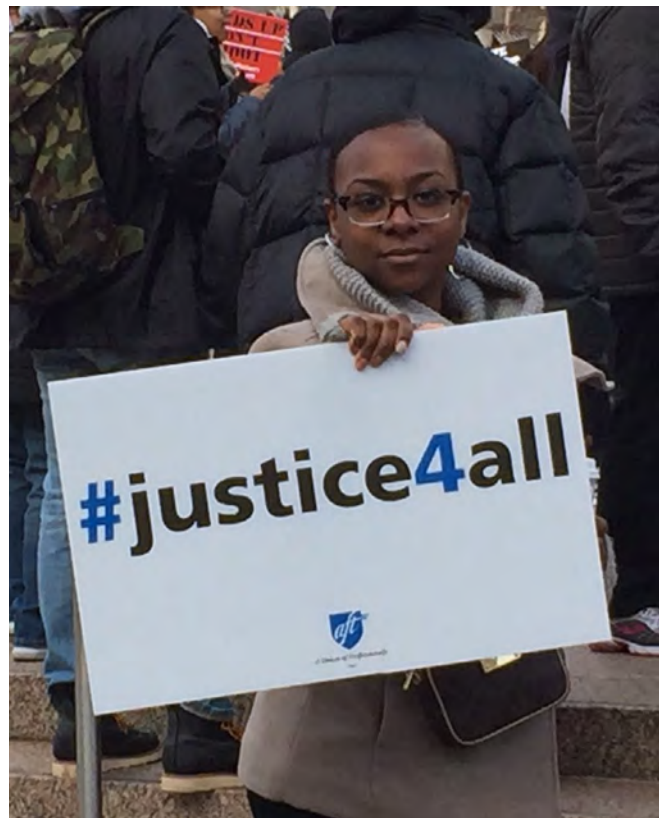


Anne Arundel County for Police Accountability rally. Keanuú Smith Brown shown on far right. Photo credit: Mary Ella Jourdak

This report calls for **urgent and transformative solutions** to address these systemic issues:

- **Reduce Unnecessary Police Encounters:** Redirect police funding to public health initiatives, including behavioral health crisis teams, and eliminate laws that encourage overcriminalization.
- **Build Community-Rooted Safety Systems:** Expand community-based programs like *Safe Streets* and *We, Our, Us* and fully integrate trained mental health professionals into emergency response systems.
- **Increase Public Safety Oversight, Transparency, and Accountability:** Give communities greater authority over police hiring, discipline, and use-of-force reviews and ensure public access to police misconduct records, use-of-force data, and fatal encounter reports.
- **Guarantee Families' Right to Information and Support:** Treat families of those harmed or killed by police as stakeholders and provide them with timely access to records and the support they need.

Although recent legislative efforts such as **Anton's Law (SB 178)** and the **Maryland Police Accountability Act of 2021 (HB 670 and SB 71)**³ have increased transparency, more work remains to address systemic failures. Maryland must move away from over-reliance on armed law enforcement and toward transparent, accountable, community-rooted public safety systems that prioritize well-being and equity—and ensure that all Marylanders, especially the most vulnerable, are truly safe. With this report, the ACLU of Maryland joins families and communities across the state in demanding nothing less.



*ACLU of Maryland's
Gina Elleby at 2014
Justice for All march*

Credits and Acknowledgments

ACLU of Maryland current and former staff members—as well as consultants and interns—contributed in different ways to this report. The categories below reflect their primary roles.

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We are deeply grateful to the families of those lost to police violence in Maryland whose voices and advocacy continue to shape the movement for truth and accountability. We especially thank the organizational partners, community coalitions, and legal experts whose research and advocacy informed the policy recommendations presented here.

Research Credits

All research and analysis was conducted by the ACLU of Maryland. Data sources are listed in the Methodology section.

Image Credits

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*Baltimore for Ferguson
protest, 2014. Photo
credit: Brittany Oliver*



Dedication

"I had to watch those police officers kill my son, while he pleaded for his life and called out to me. There are no words to describe the immense hurt that I will always feel when I think back on that tragic day."

—Jennell Black, mother of Anton Black, who was killed in 2018 by three white officers and a white bystander wearing a Confederate flag motorcycle helmet. The bystander had been watching from across the street when police enlisted him in the chase.

This report is dedicated to the families who have lost loved ones to police violence in Maryland—families who have had to grieve, fight, and demand justice in a system that too often denies them recognition, support, or answers. They share the unbearable weight of loss and the determination to ensure no one else suffers the same fate.

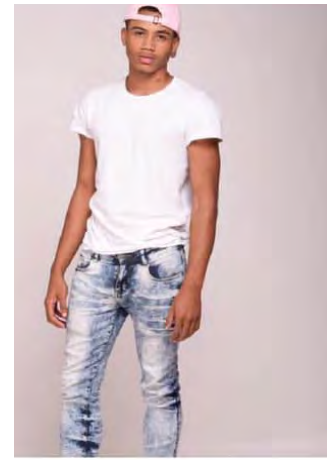
For many of these families, the pain is compounded by the lack of resources available to them. Unlike other victims of crime, they are often excluded from government support and social services. Legal representation, mental health support, and financial assistance are out of reach for many. In their isolation, they have found each other—creating networks of advocacy, support, and resilience that have become powerful forces for change.

Through their relentless efforts, these families have driven passage of key laws to increase police accountability and save future lives, including the 2015 bill requiring local law enforcement agencies to report information on officer-involved deaths (House Bill 954), the Maryland Police Accountability Act of 2021, and Anton's Law. Their advocacy has also led to a significant expansion in the use of body-worn cameras, which have proven critical in shedding light on police encounters. Between 2015 and 2022, body-worn camera footage was

available for only 34% of all fatal police encounters. By 2023, following years of advocacy and the implementation of the Maryland Police Accountability Act, that number surged to 90%. That same year, Maryland recorded its lowest number of fatal police encounters since 2015, even as police killings rose nationwide.⁴

No report can truly capture the grief, injustice, or resilience of those families. But with this report, we seek to honor them by telling the full story—laying out the data, exposing the systemic failures, and putting forward solutions that come directly from those most impacted.

Their voices, their loss, and their leadership guide this work, shaping not just our findings but our path forward toward meaningful reform.



Collage of Anton Black and his daughter.

Anton Black's family at a partial settlement press conference. Photo credit: Nehemiah Bester

Anton Black modeling headshot. Photo credit: Coalition for Justice for Anton Black



Credit: Coalition for Justice
For Anton Black



Prince George's County
Police Accountability
Board Car Rally. Photo
credit: Sergio España

Findings

The following key findings emerged from our analysis of the 143 fatal police encounters documented between 2015-2023. These findings inform the policy recommendations outlined later in this report. The full dataset, available in the searchable 2015-2023 Maryland Fatal Police Encounters Database at aclu-md.org/crisis-911/, contains far more than what is captured here. We encourage advocates, policymakers, and community members to use it to identify additional patterns, trends, and data points that may be critical to their own efforts.

Total Number

A total of **143 people** were killed by Maryland police from 2015 through 2023 through gunshots, physical force, or restraint, averaging about **16 fatalities annually**.

Persistent Racial Disparities

Black Marylanders were disproportionately represented across all findings:

- Black people accounted for nearly two-thirds (64%) of victims in fatal police encounters. Overall, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) made up 71% of all victims (see *Figure 3*).
- Black Marylanders were 3.2 times more likely to be killed by police than white Marylanders, relative to their share of the population (see *Figure 1*).
- Black Marylanders were killed at a rate **more than twice their share of the population**.
- More than **three-quarters (77%) of all unarmed victims in crisis were Black**. 82% were BIPOC.
- Nearly half of the people killed by police in Maryland while showing signs of a behavioral health crisis were Black (49%) and 60% were BIPOC.
- **Of the unarmed people killed, 78% were Black.**
- A disproportionate 62% of individuals killed by police in vehicle chases were Black.

Language Matters

When we use shorthand terms, we lose important nuance. In the findings that follow, we chose simplicity over precision, using terms like "BIPOC," "armed," and "fleeing" as shorthand. See the methodology and definitions sections for the full context behind these terms.

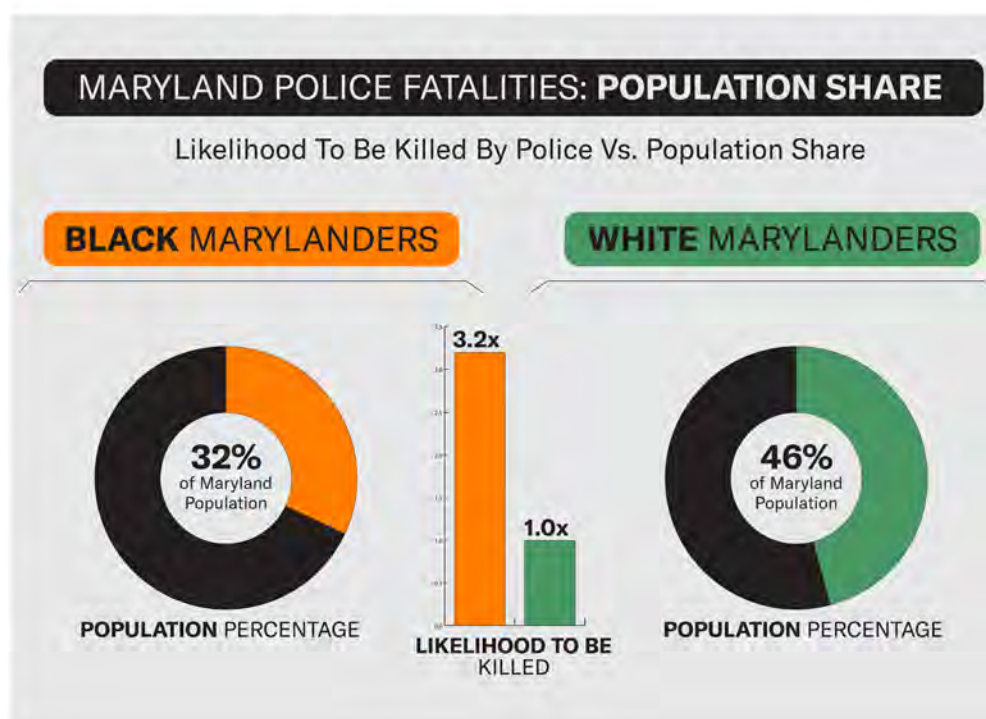


Figure 1: Maryland Police Fatalities: Population Share

Deadly Force on Young Marylanders

- Six children (18 or younger) were killed. Nearly all (five) were Black.
- 90% of young people (21 or under) killed were Black or Latine (see Figure 4).
- 42% of all victims—a total of 60 people—were 30 or younger.
- Six victims were 65 or older.

Responding to Crisis Situations with Force

Nearly half of fatal encounters (47%, or 67 people) involved someone killed while showing signs of a health crisis (see Figure 2).

Of those, 24 cases were initiated by a call to the police that was explicitly for help for someone experiencing a medical emergency or behavioral health crisis, including:

- **DeOntre Dorsey**, who was tased to death while having a seizure.
- **Tawon Boyd**, who called 911 for himself during an emergency.
- **Eric Sopp**, whose family called for help during a suicidal crisis.
- **Marcus Martin**, whose loved ones sought help to deescalate a mental health episode (see "Remembering Marcus Martin," on page 33); and
- **Gamel Antonio Brown**, who was tased and restrained after a cut on his hand prompted a call to 911.

In Crisis, Unarmed, Fleeing, and Still Killed

Nearly three in four people killed by police—101 people, or 71%—were fleeing, in crisis, and/or unarmed.

Unarmed Victims:

- 40 of the 143 people killed had no weapon of any kind.
- 78% of unarmed victims were Black.
- 82% of unarmed people killed during crisis situations were BIPOC.
- 24 unarmed people were killed while fleeing; 83% were BIPOC.

Medical Examiner Findings Mask the Truth

- An independent audit found that in at least 36 cases between 2003-2019, Maryland's Office of Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) failed to classify police-involved deaths as homicide, instead ruling them accidental, undetermined, or as the result of natural causes.⁵
- This report finds that OCME has made additional improper rulings, including in the deaths of Gamel Antonio Brown (2020, ruled "undetermined") and Edwin Morales (2020, ruled "accidental").⁶
- At least seven people⁷ died after police officers deployed electroshock weapons (e.g., Tasers). Only one was ruled a homicide.

Maryland's Crisis of Non-Accountability

- Of these 143 fatal police encounters, **zero on-duty officers were convicted of any criminal charges.**
- Four fatal encounters resulted in criminal charges against an officer. One officer was convicted: an off-duty police officer who

killed two people during a single encounter.

- At least eight of the victims were killed by officers who were involved in other fatal use-of-force incidents.

Summary and Implications

The findings in this report paint a stark picture: too many Marylanders die in fatal police encounters each year, and they are disproportionately Black and often in crisis. Despite repeated and documented patterns of harm, Maryland continues to create the conditions for fatal encounters in the first place, one that sends armed officers into crises that call for care, protects officers with violent histories, and relies on enforcement rather than investment in community health and safety. Further, Maryland law enforcement officers have largely escaped consequences. Not a single on-duty officer has been convicted across

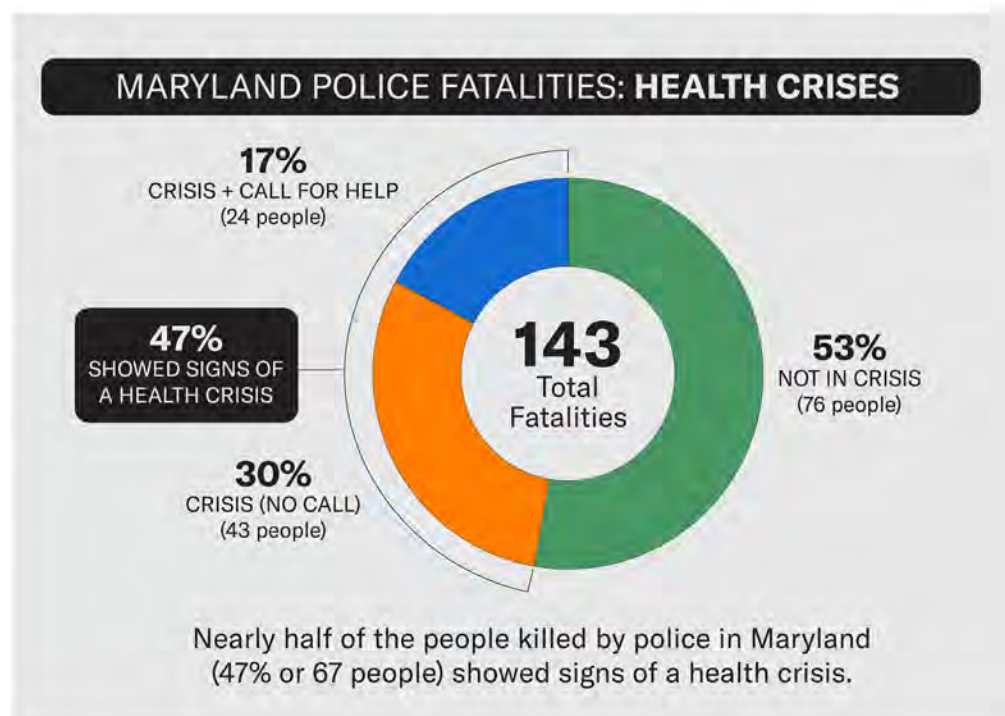


Figure 2: Maryland Police Fatalities: Health Crises

Emanuel Oates

Emanuel was a cherished brother, son, and friend who loved working with computers, playing sports, and producing music. He was known for his spirituality, his vibrant sense of humor, and his commitment to his community. His sister, Shamāiah Manriquez, reflected on his hopes for the future and said, "He had dreams—there were so many things he wanted to do, and he never got a chance to do them because he was suffering and his life was taken away."

On February 19, 2019, police received a call about potential shoplifting from a dollar store. Though Emanuel showed police a receipt, police harassed him and ultimately shot and killed him inside of a grocery store. Shamāiah said "they had no intention of preserving his life" and "they wanted him to retaliate so they had an excuse to kill him."

When asked about her brother, Shamāiah said, "what I want people to know is that Emanuel was a harmless person, and he was loved." She hopes for accountability, asking, "why is it okay for us to grieve and for them to get off the hook—for them to go on about their business, go home to their families, and sleep at night, when we are still suffering and picking up the pieces? The justice system has completely failed us."



*Emanuel Oates
through the years.
Photos provided by
Shamāiah Manriquez.*

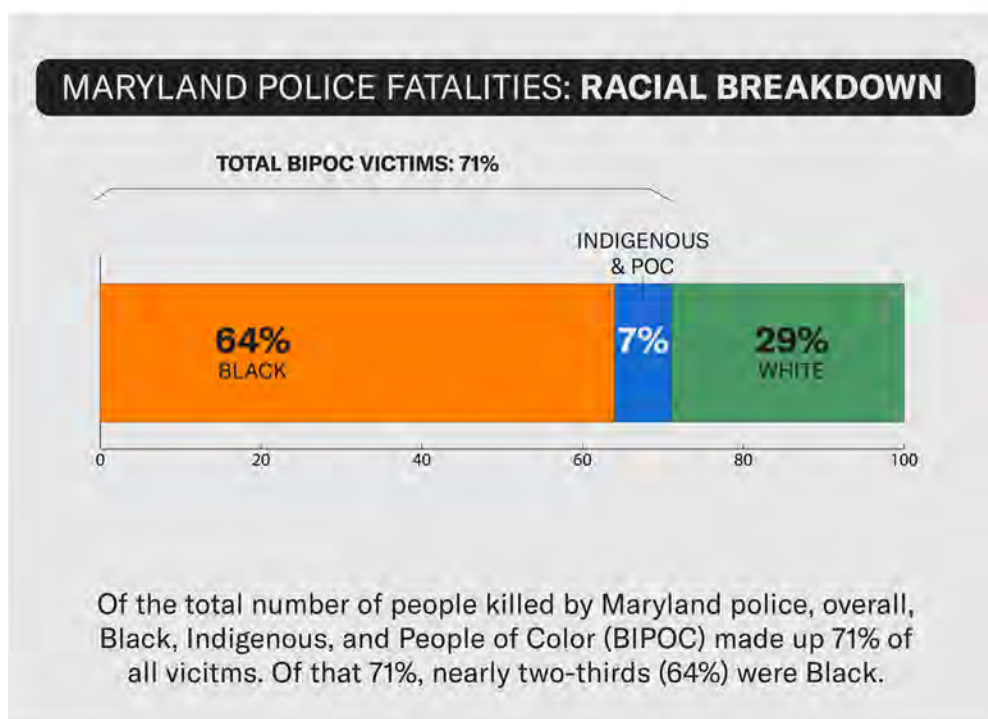


Figure 3: Maryland Police Fatalities: Racial Breakdown

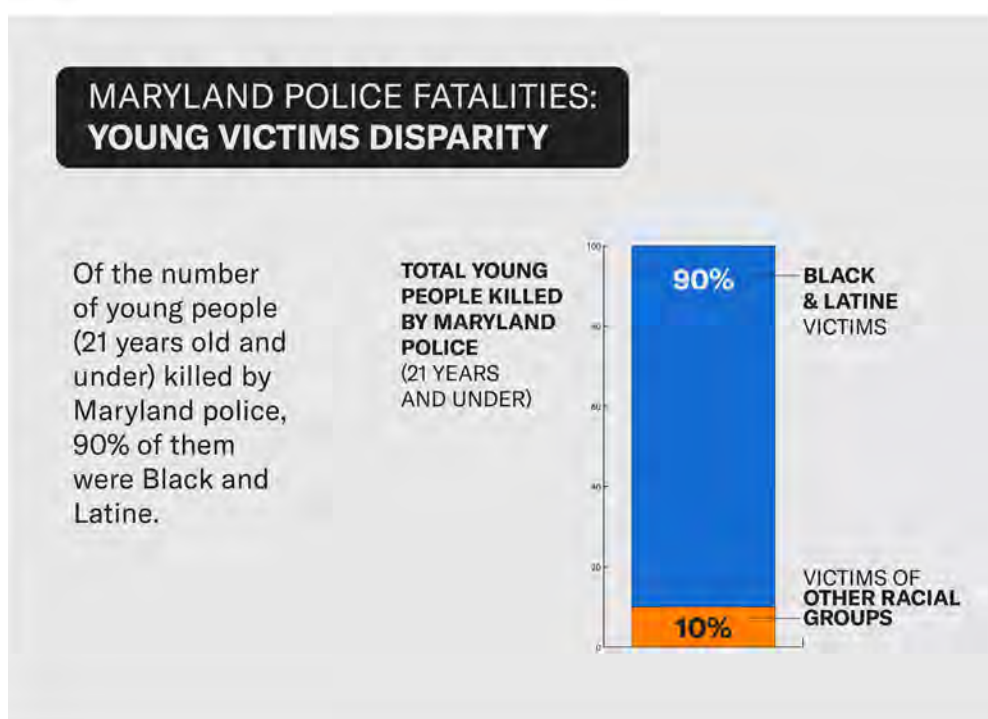


Figure 4: Maryland Police Fatalities: Young Victims Disparity

nine years of fatal encounters.

Accountability matters: when officers face no consequences, the message sent to communities—especially Black residents and those in crisis—is that it is not safe to call for help.

Recent legislative efforts like Anton's Law and the Maryland Police Accountability Act are necessary steps, but they address what happens after people die, not what puts them in danger to begin with. These deaths are not isolated tragedies. They are the product of a system that consistently fails its most vulnerable—and that failure happens long before any officer is or isn't held accountable. The urgency is not only for stronger enforcement of consequences, but for bold, systemic transformation that reduces the number of people put into potentially fatal situations in the first place.

Methodology

This report compiles and examines data from fatal police encounters in Maryland occurring from 2015 through 2023. These encounters include interactions initiated as street stops, traffic stops, warrant execution, 911 calls for service, and incidents involving off-duty officers acting as law enforcement, or using their service weapon. Our analysis is based on data from the following primary and secondary sources:

- Annual "Deaths Involving a Law Enforcement Officer" reports published by the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy (GOCPP)⁸
- Mapping Police Violence (MPV) database⁹
- *Washington Post* Fatal Police Shootings database¹⁰
- Investigative records from the Independent Investigations Division (IID) within the Maryland Attorney General's office¹¹

To ensure accuracy and completeness, we conducted additional online research into each reported fatal encounter. Our investigations focused on identifying and addressing inconsistencies or gaps in information, as well as uncovering incidents not captured by the sources above. Supplementary materials examined during our research include:

- Video and audio recordings (e.g. body-worn camera footage and 911 call recordings)
- News articles
- Press releases
- Government memoranda
- Court documents
- Statements from witnesses and family members
- Autopsy reports
- Investigative records

The full dataset compiled through this process is publicly available in the searchable 2015-2023 Maryland Fatal Police Encounters Database at aclu-md.org/crisis-911/, allowing readers to review, interrogate, and build on our findings.

Scope and Definitions

Scope of This Report

This report includes all deaths caused, or likely caused, by a use of force by police. Uses of force include: gunshot, physical restraint, taser, and person struck by a police vehicle.

This report does not include suicides in which an officer was present, although "suicide by cop" situations are included. It also does not include deaths resulting from vehicle pursuits unless police physically caused the death during or after the chase (e.g., an officer shooting the individual following a pursuit). Although these deaths are excluded from the dataset, the total number of suicide and car chase deaths, including racial breakdowns, are reported in the Areas for Further Research section of this report.

Full details for each fatal encounter within the scope of this report are available in the searchable 2015-2023 Maryland Fatal Police Encounters Database at aclu-md.org/crisis-911/. The following definitions guided our data collection and analysis, and are reflected in the fields found in the database.

Definitions

Race: The database and findings derive from the racial category recorded by law enforcement (e.g., Black, White, Hispanic, Asian). In the narrative report, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) refers to individuals categorized by law enforcement as Black, Hispanic, or Asian. The ACLU-MD uses BIPOC because it centers the unique systemic violence against Black and Indigenous people and is meant to be explicit and inclusive. However, we acknowledge the term has limitations: it conflates significant and distinct ethnic identities and may be less familiar to some readers. And, while law enforcement uses "Hispanic," this report uses the word Latine instead, as it is a gender-neutral, inclusive word to describe people of Latin American descent.

Gender: The gender recorded in primary sources. When sources conflict, priority is given to the gender identification used by the individual themselves or by someone close to them.

Note

Full details for each fatal encounter within the scope of this report are available in the searchable 2015-2023 Maryland Fatal Police Encounters Database at aclu-md.org/crisis-911/.

Location: The location where the incident that caused the death occurred.

Agency/Agencies Responsible for Death: The law enforcement agency of the officer(s) whose use of force caused the death.

Official Reported Manner of Death: The manner of death as determined by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) (e.g., Accident, Accidental, Homicide, Natural Causes, Not Found, Overdose, Undetermined).

Force Used by Police: The type of force used during the encounter (gunshot, taser, person struck by police vehicle, physical restraint).

Summary of Encounter: A summary of facts gathered from all available sources, investigated, verified, and resolved by ACLU-MD researchers, describing the circumstances of the fatal police encounter.

Initial Call Was for Behavioral Health

Crisis or Medical Need: If the call to police did not indicate a behavioral health crisis or medical need, or if no call was made, the entry is marked "No." If the caller indicated a behavioral health crisis or medical need, the call is categorized into one of the following:

- **Drug Intoxication Crisis** — The person was reported as possibly experiencing severe drug intoxication.
- **Medical Emergency** — The person was reported as possibly experiencing a medical emergency, such as a seizure or heart attack.
- **Mental Health Crisis** — The person was reported as possibly experiencing a mental health episode, such as mania or delusions.
- **Suicidal Crisis** — The person was reported to be expressing or displaying intent to end their own life.

- **Unclear** — The specific information provided in the initial call is unclear or unknown.

Criminal Charges for Officer(s): Whether the officer(s) involved in the incident were charged, regardless of the outcome. (*Note: One officer was charged in connection with the deaths of two individuals, resulting in three officers charged for four deaths.*)

Result of Criminal Charges: The outcome of criminal charges against the officer(s) (e.g., charges dropped, not guilty, pled guilty), or N/A if no charges were filed.

Police Encounter Type: The circumstances that initiated or defined the encounter between police and the individual:

- **Call for Service** — Someone contacted police to request help or action.
- **Off-Duty or Personal** — This category includes deaths by officers who were off-duty at the time but were acting in a law enforcement capacity or who used their service weapon in a domestic situation. Excluded from this entire report are killings that occurred in a personal or domestic setting where the officer was acting as a private individual, was not using their service weapon, **and** had been suspended from duty at the time of the incident.
- **Officer Witnessed Potential Crime** — The officer(s) initiated the encounter after observing something they believed to be a crime.
- **Routine Business Check** — Officers arrived at a commercial location to perform a routine check to spot or deter crime.
- **Security Gate or Checkpoint** — The encounter began at an established security gate or checkpoint.

- **Street Stop** — The officer(s) stopped an individual on foot, unrelated to a call for service.
- **Vehicle Collision** — Officer(s) responded to the scene of a car accident.
- **Vehicle Stop — Suspect or Warrant** — Officer(s) stopped a vehicle as part of an investigation or because it was suspected that an occupant committed a crime or had an outstanding warrant, unrelated to a call for service.
- **Vehicle Stop — Traffic Violation** — Officer(s) stopped a vehicle for a traffic violation, unrelated to a call for service.
- **Warrant** — Officer(s) initiated the encounter to serve a warrant or because the individual had an outstanding warrant.

Signs of Person in Behavioral Crisis:

Whether the individual exhibited behaviors or symptoms associated with a behavioral crisis, such as delusions, hallucinations, threats of self-harm, flailing, profuse sweating, extreme agitation, disorganized speech, or erratic behaviors.

- **Yes** — The individual exhibited behaviors or symptoms consistent with a behavioral crisis.
- **No** — The individual did not exhibit behaviors or symptoms consistent with a behavioral crisis.
- **Possibly** — The individual exhibited behaviors or symptoms that appeared indicative of a behavioral crisis, but the evidence is unclear or inconclusive.

Armed: Whether the individual was armed at the moment force was used:

Note

For the purpose of this report, we have accepted at face value the police classification of certain objects as weapons, including a cane, fork, and a piece of wood. "Armed" is defined by what was accessible and known to the officer at the moment force was used, not whether a weapon was later found nearby. For example, an individual is classified as unarmed if a pocket knife was in their pocket or a weapon was found elsewhere in a vehicle unknown to the officer—unless a firearm was on their person. Similarly, an individual who had a weapon but no longer had it at the moment force was used is classified as unarmed.

- **Yes** — At the moment force was used, the individual had a weapon or object capable of causing injury in hand or within immediate reach, and the officer was aware of it.
- **No** — At the moment force was used, the individual did not have a weapon or object capable of causing injury in hand or within immediate reach, or the officer had no reason to believe one was accessible.

Weapon: The type of weapon the individual was armed with, if applicable (e.g., BB gun, toy gun, knife, cane, gun, vehicle, fork, machete, non-working firearm, piece of wood, unloaded gun).

Fleeing Police: Whether and how the individual was trying to get away from police at the moment force was used:

Note

An individual is classified as fleeing if they were killed while attempting to escape police contact. This does not include individuals who were running away while shooting, or who fled after having killed someone.

- **Car** — The individual was fleeing in a vehicle.
- **Foot** — The individual was fleeing on foot (walking or running).
- **Car/Foot** — The individual fled both in a vehicle and on foot, in either order.
- **Not Fleeing** — The individual was not attempting to get away from police.

Risk of Vehicle Injuring Officer(s): Whether force was deployed while a vehicle was driving toward the officer(s), posing a risk of injury to them.

Officer Injuries: Whether the officer(s) sustained any injury as a result of the incident, including minor injuries noted as such.

BWC (Body-Worn Camera): Whether some or all of the incident was recorded on a body-worn camera.

Other Police Agencies Involved: Any police agencies that were present or involved in the incident but did not use fatal force.

GOCPP Citizen Identifier Number: The incident number assigned by the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy (GOCPP) in their annual report.

Signs at the press conference about the Montgomery County lawsuit to defend Anton's Law. Photo credit: Nehemiah Bester



Study Limitations

A core challenge in producing this report was the overwhelming reliance on law enforcement as the gatekeepers of information. Official government sources such as those published by the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy (GOCPP) base their reports almost *exclusively on police narratives*. **Because law enforcement agencies control the flow of information after a fatal encounter—including whether any information is released at all—they also control the public narrative.** These accounts often exclude critical details, obscure officer misconduct, and leave no room for the perspectives of the person killed, their loved ones, or independent observers. Access to crucial, unbiased information about a person's last moments with police is not guaranteed, making advocacy extremely difficult.

To enhance the accuracy and integrity of our findings, we supplemented law enforcement data with investigative records, media coverage, and available audio or video footage. However, many of these secondary sources still originate from or rely heavily on police-controlled narratives. GOCPP data, while foundational, was often vague or lacked key details. The agency did not release reports between 2020 and 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, further compounding gaps in public information.

Maryland lacks a standardized, transparent system for disclosing information about fatal police encounters. Families, advocates, and the public are routinely denied access to critical records, such as officer histories, investigatory materials, autopsy results, and full audio or video documentation. In many cases, there wasn't information about whether alternatives like crisis teams or de-escalation strategies were used, available, or even considered.

Despite our efforts to present a more complete and accountable record, this report is still constrained by the limited and biased nature of the data available. Even so, the evidence is clear: Maryland faces an ongoing crisis that demands urgent and systemic reform.

Roots of Police Violence in Maryland

The deeply entrenched violence and neglect inflicted upon marginalized communities in Maryland are the product of centuries of institutionalized injustice, and this legacy continues to shape policing practices today. Between 2015 and 2023, 67 people killed by police in Maryland were exhibiting signs of a behavioral health crisis. And, a total of 92 Black people were killed by police during this period. These statistics reflect a harsh reality: **Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), and people with mental health conditions remain disproportionately vulnerable to lethal police encounters.** To confront and dismantle these harmful patterns, it is essential to reckon with the history of state-sanctioned violence in Maryland.

This section traces the roots of deadly police violence in Maryland's long history of harm—from extrajudicial killings to systemic medical abuse—revealing how institutions have reinforced racist notions

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), and people with mental health conditions, remain disproportionately vulnerable to lethal police encounters.

that Black lives are inherently less valuable. This report connects historical violence to present day systemic injustices. Like past extrajudicial violence, police killings today are moments of public violence meted out as punishment for a suspected crime or even just seeking help in a crisis—without fair trial, examination of evidence, or opportunities for appeal. Institutions compound the harm by blaming the deceased, prosecutors fail to bring charges due to close ties with police, and officials frame individual incidents as the work of "bad actors" rather than symptoms of a violent, oppressive system. Grieving families are left to navigate systems designed to obscure the truth, from

William Green

Everyone knew William Green as "BooBoo." BooBoo was a father and would have now been a grandfather, he was big on his community, and was a key link between each family member. If anyone needed to know how someone was doing, they would always reach out to BooBoo. He was a talented cook and entertainer, he loved to make people laugh, and was a master at 'the dozens.' He will always be remembered for his legendary grilled pig.

His cousin, Nikki Owens, said that she always wanted to open a bed and breakfast, and BooBoo was going to be the head chef. This was going to be their retirement career. The bed and breakfast would provide jobs and offer educational opportunities for kids aging out of the foster care system, ex-military, and returning citizens, as these people are the most vulnerable to homelessness.

Nikki remembers the night BooBoo died. She heard on the news that someone in Prince George's County had been killed by police and thought to herself, "They will figure out a way to cover it up," not knowing it was her cousin. BooBoo was shot while unarmed, handcuffed, and sitting in the front seat of a police cruiser. The officer was acquitted of murder and other charges. When asked what she wanted people to know about her cousin, Nikki said, "He didn't deserve to die."

Nikki reminisced on the lasting impressions BooBoo would leave, saying "He would meet you for the first time and treat you like you're the most important person in the world."



Nikki Owens speaks at a rally for justice for William Green. Photo credit: Lorena Magdalena Diaz

William "BooBoo" Green and cousin Nikki Owens. Photo credit: Nikki Owens

investigations to civil litigation, all shielded by legal protections that favor law enforcement. Naming these patterns and their roots is the first step toward dismantling them.

Maryland's History of Racialized Violence and Medical Abuse

Maryland's history is marked by extensive, largely unchecked violence against communities of color. From 1854 to 1933, Maryland witnessed 44 documented lynchings of Black people, as uncovered by research from the Maryland State Archives, the Equal Justice Initiative, and Bowie State University.¹² These brutal acts often began with an unfounded accusation against a Black person, quickly escalating into public torture and murder by white mobs. Local newspapers often presumed the victim's guilt, fueling public approval or apathy for the mob's actions. Law enforcement, jailers, and even medical personnel often participated in the atrocities or stood silent, allowing these horrific, racist acts to continue without punishment.

At the same time, systemic exploitation in Maryland's medical systems fostered a deep distrust among Black communities. In the late 18th and 19th centuries, medical schools in Maryland relied on the bodies of Black people, immigrants, and the poor—often obtained through grave robbery—for educational purposes.¹³ Between 1898 and 1904, two-thirds of the cadavers used at Johns Hopkins Medical School were Black,¹⁴ despite Black people representing only 16% of Baltimore's population.¹⁵ The infamous exploitation of Henrietta Lacks, a Black woman from East Baltimore whose cancer cells were harvested without her consent, epitomizes how Black lives have historically

been commodified in the name of science and medicine, without regard for their humanity or rights.¹⁶ Symbolized by the stories of "night doctors" who would abduct, kill, and dissect people from Black neighborhoods, this nightmarish legacy fuels a deep and lasting mistrust of medical institutions within Black communities.

For Black Marylanders and those with mental health conditions, the state's mental health system compounded historical abuses, intensifying their vulnerability to danger and injustice. The 1949 exposé *Maryland's Shame*¹⁷ uncovered severe abuse, neglect, and deplorable conditions in state-run mental health facilities such as Crownsville Hospital Center. One of the last segregated mental health facilities, Crownsville was possibly the only hospital in the nation's history to be built using forced labor from its earliest patients.¹⁸

Hospital staff and administrators relied on racist psychiatric philosophies and practices to justify institutionalization of Black residents and subjecting them to physical abuse, forced medical experimentation, and drug testing without consent.¹⁹ Violence and neglect at the hospital were so prevalent that at times Crownsville's death rate surpassed its discharge rate.²⁰ This traumatic history echoes in today's medical institutions,²¹ as Black Marylanders in need of medical or behavioral health support remain intensely vulnerable to institutional violence and neglect.

Modern police violence is rooted in systemic injustices deeper and broader than this report alone can fully capture. While this historical overview is not exhaustive, it helps to reveal how Maryland's legacy of racialized violence and medical abuse directly informs today's culture of impunity and shapes the

conditions that allow police violence to persist unchecked.

Today's System of Impunity for Police Violence

Maryland's troubling legacy of police violence, particularly against Black and Brown communities, continues today, reinforced by systemic protections that shield officers from accountability. In 1974, Maryland set a problematic national standard with the enactment of the Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights (LEOBR),²² granting police officers extensive protections beyond those available to most citizens. In 1992, the ACLU of Maryland's lawsuit against the Maryland State Police for racially profiling Black drivers helped to popularize the term "driving while Black."²³ Between 1990 and 2000, the Prince George's County Police Department became infamous for killing more people than any other major city or county police force in the United States.²⁴ The 2015 killing of Freddie Gray ignited national outrage and drew worldwide attention to Maryland's longstanding patterns of police brutality and systemic protections for officers, but it followed years of advocacy by other family members involving the deaths of victims like Tyrone West and Gary Hopkins, Jr. After that, Baltimore City's Gun Trace Task Force (GTTF) scandal revealed a police unit systematically robbing civilians and flooding communities with drugs, a case that captured national attention and inspired a popular HBO series.²⁵

In recent years, federal investigations have consistently exposed deep-rooted patterns of racial discrimination and excessive force within Maryland's law enforcement agencies. Police departments in Baltimore City,²⁶ Montgomery County,²⁷ Prince George's

County,²⁸ and Pocomoke City²⁹ have been subjects of intense U.S. Department of Justice investigations, uncovering widespread misconduct and civil rights violations. In 2021, the ACLU of Maryland's *Chasing Justice* report found that 91% of people subjected to Baltimore Police Department uses of force between 2015 and 2019 were Black, and that just 6% of officers accounted for approximately 33% of all complaints.³⁰ The Frederick County Sheriff's Office's controversial 287(g) immigration enforcement program allowed local officers to act as federal immigration agents, thus funneling people from Latine and immigrant communities into the racist deportation pipeline.³¹ These scandals reflect the entrenched nature of violence and discrimination in Maryland policing, as well as persistent barriers to reform.

Institutional protections allow Maryland law enforcement officials to evade accountability at every stage of investigation. First, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) often misclassifies police-involved deaths in ways that shift culpability away from officers and onto victims, diverting scrutiny from officer actions. Second, prosecutors' reliance on police cooperation, along with historically close relationships between prosecutors and law enforcement, frequently discourages the pursuit of criminal charges. Finally, even in cases where prosecutors bring charges against officers or victim families file civil lawsuits, substantial legal safeguards help police avoid legal consequences. Together, these institutional protections form a near-impenetrable barrier to justice, enabling a culture where police officers rarely expect consequences and violence continues unchecked.



In many ways, the legal system—including prosecutors and courts—*presumes* that officers act lawfully, and has evolved in ways that create enormous deference to police narratives and judgments regardless of context. These presumptions make it harder for victims to find justice in the courts, whether through civil lawsuits or criminal cases.

*Toni Sanders protesting.
Photo credit: Allison
Shelley, ACLU*

Shielding Violence: The Role of the Chief Medical Examiner

The National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, honors more than 4,400 Black Americans lynched nationwide, including Maryland's 44 documented lynchings, 1854-1933. Photo credit: Nehemiah Bester



Maryland's culture of normalizing and excusing police violence has been bolstered by the policies and practices of state actors, including the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME). Established in 1939 as the nation's first statewide medical examiner system, OCME's handling of high-profile and police-involved death investigations has raised concerns about transparency and conflicts of interest. One example is the 1986 death of Keith Warren, a Black teenager found hanging from a tree in Silver Spring, MD, which was ruled a suicide despite clear evidence to the contrary.³² In the decades since, families and communities impacted by police violence have continued to accuse OCME of conducting incomplete and biased investigations into other suspicious deaths, including the inadequate investigation into Katherine Morris's death in 2012 and the controversial handling of Anton Black's death in 2018.³³

Together, these cases highlight a persistent and troubling pattern from that office of collaboration to obscure truth, shift blame onto victims, and shield police officers from accountability.

During the summer of 2020, the murder of a Black man named George Floyd by white Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin sparked national outrage and drew attention to the brutal and often fatal consequences of police violence. The disturbing images of Mr. Floyd's death—Chauvin pressing his knee into Floyd's neck for over nine minutes as he pleaded for his life—served as a stark reminder of the systemic nature of police brutality and sparked Black Lives Matter protests across the country. At Officer Chauvin's trial in Minneapolis, Maryland's former chief medical examiner of 17 years, Dr. David Fowler, testified as an expert for the defense. He argued that George Floyd's death was "undetermined" rather than homicide, and cited heart disease, drug use, and vehicle exhaust as contributing factors

rather than asphyxia from the officer's knee on his neck for nearly 10 minutes.

National outrage over Floyd's death and Dr. Fowler's testimony brought renewed scrutiny to OCME's handling of a similar case in Maryland from 2018. That year, Anton Black, a 19-year-old from Greensboro, MD, died after being restrained, face down, by three white officers and another white man in a manner strikingly similar to Floyd's murder.³⁴ Still, the official response failed to hold the officers accountable. That failure was compounded by Chief Medical Examiner Fowler, who covered up the officers' responsibility in his official report, falsely attributing Black's death to a benign, pre-existing heart condition and bipolar disorder rather than to the officers' actions. His conclusion directly contradicted clear body camera footage showing officers restraining Black in a way that interfered with his attempts to breathe.³⁵

In a lawsuit, Black's family contended that under Dr. Fowler's leadership, OCME had a longstanding practice of concealing the truth about how police caused civilian deaths, using misleading statements and medical jargon and disregarding established standards.³⁶ OCME's deception misled police, prosecutors, and the public to believe the deaths could not have been prevented by changes in police practices. The family showed that—absent a gunshot wound—OCME almost never found that deaths in police custody were homicides. In 57 such cases, OCME concluded the death was not a homicide 88% of the time—even when the victim had been tased, pepper sprayed, subjected to police baton strikes, prone restraint, or other uses of force. Worse, the racial disparities were stark: OCME

examiners were far more likely to conclude a death in state custody was a homicide when the decedent was white (21% of the time) than Black (8% of the time).

In the Minneapolis case, Fowler's claims were rejected by the jury, and his attempt to exonerate Chauvin resulted in harsh criticism from the medical community. His testimony in Chauvin's trial and his past conduct, including his ruling on Black's death and the litigation filed by Black's family decrying the ruling as a cover-up, prompted over 500 medical and public health professionals to urge a comprehensive review of all in-custody deaths overseen by Dr. Fowler between 2002 and 2019. Maryland's Attorney General agreed in 2021 to conduct this review, convening a team of national experts to undertake an independent audit of OCME's handling of custodial deaths during Fowler's two-decade tenure.

In 2025, the audit confirmed serious concerns: in more than half of the cases reviewed, external reviewers disagreed with the OCME's original manner of death determination.³⁷ The audit identified 36 cases that the experts said should have been ruled homicide. It also documented the discredited use of *excited delirium*, and exposed systemic flaws in autopsy documentation, including missing photos, ignored body camera footage, and restraint-related injuries that went unnoted. Six people included in this report were named in the audit.

These findings confirm what grieving families and advocates have known: the OCME's longstanding practice of mischaracterizing deaths to protect police illustrates the systemic challenges to achieving genuine accountability for police violence.³⁸

Protected by the Courts: How Prosecutors and Legal Doctrine Shield Police

In many ways, the legal system—including prosecutors and courts—*presumes* that officers act lawfully, and has evolved in ways that create enormous deference to police narratives and judgments regardless of context. These presumptions make it harder for victims to find justice in the courts, whether through civil lawsuits or criminal cases.

Even when deaths are officially labeled as homicides, prosecutors frequently hesitate to bring charges against police officers due to existing relationships, systemic biases, and special legal protections granted to police. Prosecutors typically work closely with police, fostering relationships that can be essential to building cases and planning strategy. But that rapport can create significant conflicts of interest when it comes to investigating potential police misconduct, improperly influencing prosecutorial decisions.

For example, prosecutors may favor police narratives even when clear evidence directly contradicts them—and, because of their

pre-existing relationships, prosecutors do not try to find those contradictions, as they do in other homicides.

Similarly, court doctrines determining officer uses of force are also extraordinarily deferential to police in determining whether an officer's actions on the job were reasonable or justified, which makes securing convictions challenging. These doctrines deter prosecutions in the first place and make it harder to succeed even when criminal charges *are* filed. Crucially, they also perpetuate the false narrative that such deaths are inevitable or that police could not have done things differently.

Victims face similar barriers when they try to bring their own civil lawsuits. In addition to the highly deferential doctrines specific to police uses of force, *qualified immunity* further shields police agencies and officers

from legal consequences. Among other things, this doctrine requires victims to prove that courts have *already* ruled in nearly identical circumstances that the specific ways police acted in their case

Between 1990 and 2000, the Prince George's County Police Department became infamous for killing more people than any other major city or county police force in the United States.



Sign at April 2015 justice for Freddie Grey protest. Photo credit: Meredith Curtis Goode

violated the U.S. Constitution—that this was a "clearly established" constitutional violation. Because courts have rarely defined such rights in the first place, this requirement makes it much harder for victims to prevail in court, even in cases of egregious misconduct such as the 2016 case of Kodi Gaines, a five-year-old boy shot by police when they killed his mother, Korryn.³⁹

Even when victims survive these legal barriers and prove misconduct in their civil case, Maryland's legal framework imposes caps on financial damages awarded. A lack of financial consequences for departments and municipalities who violate the law undermine meaningful reform within police institutions.

Between 2015 and 2023, no Maryland officer was convicted for killing someone during a police encounter while on duty.

Marcus Martin

Marcus Martin's house was "the spot." He was the grill master of his family and went out of his way to bring people together. He offered help in any way he could, feeding those who stopped by and getting folks excited about his career as a truck driver. Marcus's wife, Kelly, remembers that people would joke about his love for his industry, saying things like, "There goes Marcus again talking about trucking..." Marcus played lacrosse and football for his high school, Baltimore City College, and supported his teams through his life. His commitment to school and sports lives on through his two children: Marcus's daughter graduated from Morgan State in 2024 and his son recently graduated from Calvert Hall, where he followed in his father's steps and played high school football.

On August 8, 2021, police received a call that Marcus was having a mental health crisis that was possibly related to his diagnosis of schizophrenia. Police did not call a crisis response team and instead summoned SWAT officers, who cut the power to the house and sent a robot in to record Marcus. After Marcus allegedly shot at the robot, a SWAT sniper shot and killed him.

After Marcus's death, Kelly said, "What we want to do is bring awareness to the situation." Marcus's family has pushed for reform and filed a civil lawsuit against the police department, in hopes to improve communication between police departments and create better processes for responding to individuals experiencing mental health crises.



Marcus Martin at a birthday party.

Marcus Martin with his wife, Kelly, and kids.

Excited Delirium

"Excited delirium" is a discredited pseudo-medical diagnosis, rejected by major medical associations. OCME routinely used the diagnosis to explain away in-custody deaths involving restraint, force, or chemical sedation, particularly among BIPOC victims. In doing so, OCME shielded officers and police practices from scrutiny while denying families truth and justice.

Together, these legal precedents and protections establish a burden of proof so demanding that victims can find it impossible to pursue justice. These legal frameworks allow police to act with impunity and contribute to systemic injustice, perpetuating harmful myths and precluding changes that would save lives.⁴⁰

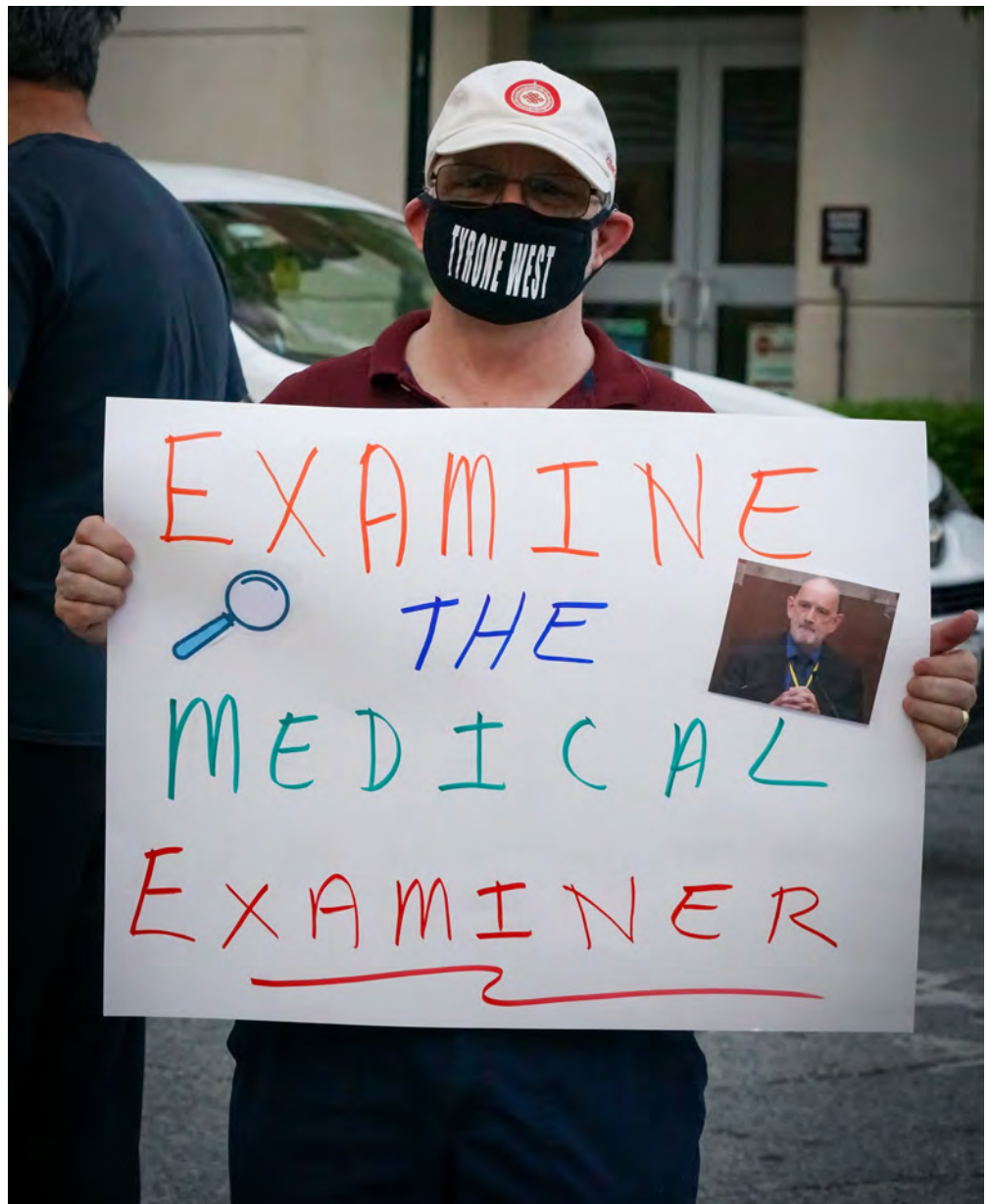
The result is that very few officers or agencies are ever found liable for their actions in civil court—and even fewer face criminal consequences. **Between 2015 and 2023, no Maryland officer was convicted for killing someone during a police encounter while on duty.**⁴¹ The sole officer convicted was an off-duty officer who was prosecuted only after his fatal shooting of two victims in his apartment complex was caught on camera, contradicting his blatantly untrue claim of self-defense.⁴²

Reforms and Resistance: The Path Towards Police Accountability

Despite these challenges, recent reforms in Maryland show some promise. The 2021 passage of the **Maryland Police Accountability Act** marked a significant step toward addressing systemic conflicts of interest in local police investigations by creating the Independent Investigations Division (IID) within the Attorney General's Office, tasked specifically with independently investigating fatal police encounters and in-custody deaths. A 2023 amendment expanded IID's authority to include prosecutorial powers—despite opposition from police unions and local state's attorneys. Still, resistance to reforms continues, as seen in Harford County Sheriff Jeffrey Gahler's refusal to cooperate with IID after deputies killed 53-year-old John Fauver, requiring the Attorney General to undertake a court enforcement action.⁴³

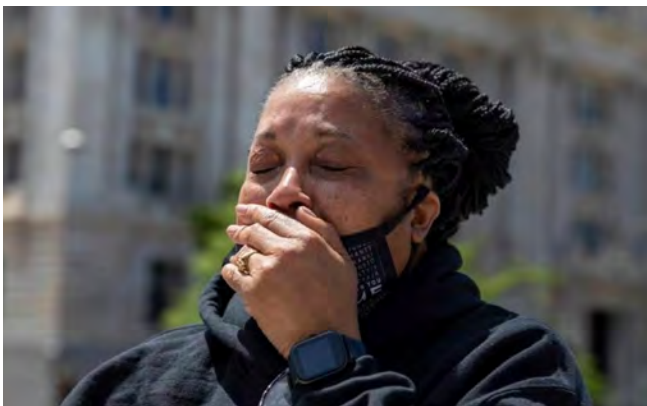
In recent years, Police Accountability Boards (PABs) and Administrative Charging Committees (ACCs) have been presented as a tool to promote police accountability and more robust oversight. However, these oversight bodies often lack sufficient authority, and their decisions frequently face challenges through police appeals. In Baltimore City, the introduction of PABs and ACCs has come at a cost: the elimination of the Civilian Review Board. Police departments and unions continue to protect their interests by resisting meaningful oversight—and thus proving the importance of advocacy for data-driven, consistently evaluated, and strengthened reforms.

These findings confirm what grieving families and advocates have known: the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner's longstanding practice of mischaracterizing deaths to protect police illustrates the systemic challenges to achieving genuine accountability for police violence.



West Wednesday rally in front of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in Baltimore City, 2021. Photo credit: Nicole McCann

Recommendations and Policy Reflections



Korryn Gaines and her son, Kodi.

Korryn Gaines' mother, Rhanda Dormeus. Photo credit: AP, Amanda Andrade-Rhoades.

Years of listening to impacted families, analyzing fatal police encounters, and reviewing available data make one fact painfully clear: **Maryland's crisis of deadly police violence is not the result of isolated actions by rogue officers.** Instead, it is the result of deeply embedded systemic failures rooted in law, policy, and institutional practice. People experiencing medical emergencies, mental health crises, or similar issues are met with law enforcement officers who are not trained or equipped to provide the nuanced support these moments require. The immediate harm from these failures is evident in lives lost, but the consequences are compounded by systems that excuse misconduct, conceal the truth and deny justice.

Reimagining public safety means reducing the number of police encounters, increasing transparency, investing in community-rooted responses, and building systems that treat people with care rather than force.

Some of the most effective public safety strategies in Maryland are already underway but need greater investment and protection. In 2020, Baltimore's *Safe Streets* program successfully de-escalated more than 2,300 potentially violent conflicts without relying on police, proving that community-led intervention—rather than arrests—reduces violence in high-risk areas. Similarly, institutional



Crownsville State Hospital

change is possible when those closest to the community help lead it. At Crownsville Hospital, conditions began to improve only after the faculty began hiring Black staff members with personal ties to the patients. These staff helped reframe the institution's culture, treating patients not as problems to be managed, but as people deserving of dignity and care. That shift, rooted in shared experience and community connection, offers a powerful lesson for rethinking public safety. When impacted communities are given real decision-making power over law enforcement practices, from hiring and training to discipline and oversight, the system becomes more humane, more accountable, and more effective.

While internal police reforms and shifts toward community policing models are necessary, they are not enough. Maryland must fully embrace public health-based strategies that reduce the number of police interactions altogether.

Promising models already exist. The Central Maryland Regional Crisis System and the Anne Arundel County Crisis Response System offer non-police alternatives for people in crisis, but they need consistent, statewide funding and expansion to reach every community. These programs are most effective when fully equipped to respond to complex emergencies, including situations involving armed individuals, which are increasingly common in an era of expanded Second Amendment rights.⁴⁴

Erica Hamlett speaking to at Baltimore's Civilian Review Board's 2018 press conference for transparency. Photo credit: Amy Cruice

Limiting harmful police practices is also crucial. Quota-based performance systems, like those allegedly used by Maryland State Police to track traffic stops and arrests, encourage unnecessary enforcement, escalate community tensions, and increase the risk of



violence. Even officers report these quotas as ineffective and stressful.⁴⁵ Eliminating these practices would reduce unnecessary contact between law enforcement and the public, especially in communities already overpoliced. **Until we see substantial changes in police culture, policy, and practice, increasing low-level encounters remains a dangerous and irresponsible strategy.**

Finally, Maryland must uphold the principle that every life deserves protection. There are already examples where officers successfully apprehended armed white suspects without using force. Suspects like Benjamin Murdy, who fired more than 200 rounds at police officers after shooting both his dog and his neighbor;⁴⁶ David Linthicum, who fled police in a stolen police vehicle after shooting an officer multiple times;⁴⁷ and Johnathan Shevock, who attempted to ram a police vehicle during a traffic stop⁴⁸ were taken into custody without violence,

Until we see substantial changes in police culture, policy, and practice, increasing low-level encounters remains a dangerous and irresponsible strategy.

despite the risks they posed. These acts of restraint against white suspects must be the standard, not the exception. All communities deserve responses rooted in care, not control. Building systems that treat people with empathy, especially in moments of crisis, is the foundation for real safety and lasting justice.



Anne Arundel Coalition for Police Accountability
March for Police Accountability, Annapolis, MD.
Photo credit: Amy Cruice.

Policy Recommendations:

To achieve a meaningful reduction in fatal police encounters, Maryland, the state must adopt a comprehensive, community-centered strategy that addresses systemic inequities, limits harmful police practices, and invests in proven public health alternatives. This includes reallocating resources, strengthening behavioral health infrastructures, expanding oversight, and empowering impacted communities. The following recommendations are not just technical fixes, they are moral imperatives. Together, they create a roadmap for policymakers to build a safer, more equitable Maryland where all residents—especially Black, Brown, communities with low income, people with disabilities, and individuals experiencing behavioral crises—can survive and thrive.

Reduce Unnecessary Police Encounters

- Limit street stops and police vehicle pursuits, and mandate post-incident reviews to assess necessity and harm.
- Repeal laws that criminalize poverty, substance use, and other non-violent behaviors.
- Refocus police efforts on solving serious crimes, not escalating minor ones.
- Prioritize non-police responses to mental health and substance use emergencies.
 - Establish hospital-based systems for staff to flag suspected police abuse or excessive force, similar to how providers are trained to recognize and report signs of domestic violence.

- Fully fund a statewide, 24/7 behavioral health crisis response system that includes a dedicated crisis hotline, mobile crisis response units, and mental health stabilization centers with beds, ensuring support for people in crisis without relying on police intervention.
- Train dispatchers to appropriately route calls to crisis responders outside of law enforcement.

Build Community-Rooted Safety Systems

- Expand funding for violence interruption and community mediation programs like *Safe Streets* and *We, Our, Us*.
- Recognize these community-based alternatives as essential public safety infrastructure, with consistent, equitable support free from politicized defunding threats.
- Invest in programs that address the root causes of crime—such as poverty, trauma, and lack of access to services—particularly for youth and historically over-policed communities.
- Shift funding from policing toward public health initiatives, with a focus on mental health crisis response and violence prevention.

Increase Public Safety Oversight, Transparency, and Accountability

- Establish independent, community-led oversight bodies with real authority to investigate police practices and hold officers accountable.



A protest sign that says, "I can't breathe. Anton Black."

- Empower communities to shape public safety by involving residents in hiring, promotions, and discipline decisions.
- Track and publicly report the use of de-escalation tactics and non-lethal responses.
- Require full transparency on use-of-force incidents, misconduct complaints, and settlement agreements. Disaggregate this data by race, gender, age, and disability status to inform legislative and regulatory decision-making.
- Repeal policies that shield officers with known records of misconduct from public scrutiny or discipline.
- Create a public review process for medical examiner rulings involving law enforcement, led by community members and independent experts.

Guarantee Families' Right to Information and Support

- Ensure families of those harmed or killed by police receive timely access to all records, including autopsies, body-camera footage, and officer discipline histories.
- Treat families of those harmed or killed by police as stakeholders rather than adversaries in legal and institutional processes.
- Provide legal and mental health support to families navigating systems that too often deny them answers and dignity.

Areas for Further Research

ACLU of Maryland's David Rocah speaking at a press conference about Montgomery County lawsuit to defend Anton's Law. Photo credit: Nehemiah Bester

This report offers a crucial foundation for understanding the scale and patterns of fatal police encounters in Maryland, but there is far more to uncover. As our findings reveal, many lives are lost under conditions that raise serious questions about institutional response, systemic bias, and public policy. To build a truly just and effective public safety system, we must continue investigating the broader ecosystem that enables police violence—and the policy shifts that can prevent it.



Each of the following areas point to structural failures and overlooked patterns that deserve urgent attention. While our analysis focused on 143 deaths involving police use of force, the following nine research priorities are intended to guide advocates, journalists, and scholars toward the questions that remain unanswered and the systems that demand closer scrutiny. The 2015-2023 Maryland Fatal Police Encounters Database, available at aclu-md.org/crisis-911/, is a starting point for that work and we invite advocates, policymakers, and researchers to use it to dig deeper, ask new questions, and build on what this report found.

1. Fatal Police Vehicle Chases

How do police pursuit policies contribute to preventable deaths, and how often are officers held accountable for violating them?

Between 2015 and 2023, 45 people died during 39 police pursuits—10 of them bystanders, including a one-year-old Black infant. Among these bystanders: five were women, five were white, four were Black, and one was Latine.⁴⁹ Black people made up **62%** of all those killed in vehicle chases. Future research should examine the role of pursuit policies in these deaths and the frequency with which officers face consequences when those policies are violated.

2. Suicides During Police Encounters

What are the missed opportunities to prevent suicides during police encounters, and how can crisis teams intervene more effectively?

At least 73 people died by suicide during police interactions. Of those, 71% were white and 89% were male. Researchers should examine how often crisis units

respond to suicide-related calls, what barriers prevent their deployment, and how frequently police successfully de-escalate these situations on their own.

3. Deaths in Custody and Institutional Confinement

What patterns exist in deaths that occur in jails, prisons, and mental health facilities, and what role do systemic failures play?

This report focused on use-of-force deaths involving law enforcement in the field. Future research should expand to deaths in custody, including those in jails, prisons, and psychiatric institutions, as well as fatalities involving private police or security. Areas of inquiry should include causes of death, demographic disparities, and accountability mechanisms.

4. Evaluating the Impact of Police Reforms

Have Maryland's police accountability laws measurably reduced police violence or improved oversight?

Laws like Anton's Law and the Maryland Police Accountability Act of 2021 are steps forward, but their long-term impact remains unclear. Research should track their implementation, measure outcomes, and compare jurisdictions to assess whether these reforms are reducing harm or being undermined in practice.

5. Crisis Response Systems

How often are non-police crisis units deployed, and how do their outcomes compare to police-led responses?

Maryland has begun investing in behavioral health crisis systems, but more data is needed to evaluate their effectiveness. Studies should explore the deployment rates, effectiveness, and limitations of these programs, as well as

how they could be scaled or strengthened statewide.

6. More Information on Victims of Police Violence

What social, economic, and systemic factors increase someone's risk of dying during a police encounter?

To reduce fatal police encounters, we must understand the lives of those most affected. How many had previous contact with the criminal legal system? How many were enrolled in public assistance programs like Medicaid or SNAP? Future studies should explore how poverty, health status, housing insecurity, and other socioeconomic factors intersect with fatal police violence.

7. Police Violence as a Public Health Crisis

How do public health crises like mental illness, gun access, and opioid use interact with police violence? And what non-police interventions, if any, reduce harm?

Police violence should be studied like any other public health emergency. Researchers should analyze how the mental health crisis, substance use epidemics, and widespread firearm access intersect with fatal police encounters. This framing would help identify upstream solutions rooted in care rather than force.

8. The Mental Health System and Police Violence

How has the decline of mental health infrastructure contributed to the over-reliance on police, and what alternatives are needed?

Too often, people experiencing mental health crises are bounced between systems, like emergency rooms, jails, and police, without receiving adequate care.

Researchers should trace how institutional breakdowns lead to police encounters and study the pathways that bring people with mental health diagnoses into contact with law enforcement.

9. Social Norms and Definitions of "Armed Threats"

How do racial bias and vague definitions of "armed" shape deadly police decision-making?

Being labeled "armed" is often used to justify deadly force, yet that label is inconsistently applied. Future studies should examine how race, gender, age, and object type affect officer perceptions of threat and influence use of deadly force. For example, are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) more likely to be deemed "armed" when carrying household items like a fork or cane?

Across all of these areas, one truth remains clear: police violence is not an isolated problem. It is a systemic crisis that must be studied, understood, and addressed with the same rigor and urgency as any public health epidemic. Through continued research to address these gaps, we can equip Maryland's policymakers, communities, and institutions with the knowledge needed to save lives and end the cycle of state-sanctioned harm.

The People Behind the Numbers

Following are the names of every person killed by police in Maryland from 2015 to 2023. In solidarity with Black-led movements like #SayHerName⁵⁰ and #SayTheirNames,⁵¹ we want to emphasize that each of these individuals was a real person—not a data point or statistic. They had dreams, strengths, struggles, and hopes. They left behind loved ones who continue to mourn their loss and honor their memory. They are lives that were tragically cut short—stories unfinished. By saying their names, we actively resist their erasure and dehumanization, ensuring they are remembered and recognized.

Details about each of these individuals and the police encounter that ended their life can be found in the searchable 2015-2023 Maryland Fatal Police Encounters Database at aclu-md.org/crisis-911/. Together, their stories reflect the full weight of Maryland's failure to protect its residents from violence by law enforcement.

They are loved and remembered. May they rest in peace.

Jose Alvarez

Abraham Arellano

Jonathan Balchunas

Tyrone Domingo Banks

Finan H. Berhe

Anton Black, Jr.

Gary Carmona Boitano

Tawon Boyd

Shawn Lequin Braddy

Travis Boyd Bradley

Edward Donnell Bright, Sr.

William Robert Brink

Darrell Lawrence Brown

Gamel Antonio Brown

Everton Brown

Kevin T. Brunson

Rashad Bugg-Bey

Gregory Campfield, Jr.

Jack Cimino, Jr.

Christopher E. Clapp

Denzell Nathan Clarke

Lavaughn Coleman

Cpl. Jacai D. Colson

Oddis Bernard Colvin, Jr.

Kerry Lee Coomer

Kevin Costlow

Bryan Coupal

James Covington, Jr.

Michael J. D'Angelo

Curtis Jamal Deal

Hamed Ghorouni Delcheh
John Lowell Dollen
DeOntre L. Dorsey
Lavar "Nook" Montray Douglas
Blaine Robert Erb
Rodney Eubanks
Jeffrey Gene Evans
David Brian Evans
John Raymond Fauver
John Feggins
Timothy Fleming
Shawn Devin Floyd
Korryn Gaines
Darryl Gamble
Terry Garnett, Jr.
Eric Garrison
Martin "Marty" Allen Goodier
Dajuan Graham
Freddie Gray
Dontae Green
Mya Hall
Charles S. Hall
David Edward Hall
Dayten Ernest Harper
Brenda Jenette Harrison-Bumbray
Daniel Michael Holley
Anthony Hopkins, Sr.
Robert Jerome Howard
Rick Howell
Steve Huff
Darin Hutchins
Hunter Jessup
Kimani Johnson
Rico Don Rae Johnson
Robert Johnson, Jr.

Robert Uhl Johnson
James Lionel Johnson
Brandon Jones
William Howard Green, Jr.
Vusumuzi Kunene
Ryan LeRoux
Duncan Socrates Lemp
Christine A. Lucas
William Charles "Chas" MacKenzie
Asshams Pharoah Manley
Ryan Quinn Martin
Marcus Martin
Michael Marullo
Kevin Bruce Mason
William Tucker Mathis
Spencer Lee McCain
Brian McCourry, Jr.
Keith Harrison McLeod
James Douglas Meadows
Aaron Mensah
Darius Miller, Jr.
Cody Ethan Mitchell
Tyree Moorehead
Edwin Morales
Julio Cesar Moran-Ruiz
Edel Cato Moreland
Kareem Omar Morgan
Emanuel David Joshua Oates
Kwamena Ocran
Rashad Daquan Opher
Franklin Castro Ordonez
Carlos Ortega
Reno Joseph Owens, Jr.
John Carlos Natera-Perez (aka Jean Perez)
Ralph Picarello, III

Ashanti Pinkney
Leonard Popa, Sr.
Chelsea M. Porter
Justin Powell
Dyonta Quarles, Jr.
Arnel Redfern
Fednel Rhinvil
James Rich, II
Scott William Robertson
Donnell Rochester
Billy Lewis Rucker
Nathaniel Sassafras
Derrick Alexander Sellman
Bryan Selmer
Osman Sesay
Leonard Shand
Joseph Sherrill
Jovan Lewis Singleton
Eric Sopp
Etonne T. Tanzymore
Dion Lamar Taylor
Jamaal Ramone Taylor
Mikyas Mehary Tegegne

Terrence Thomas, Jr
Joseph Robert Henry Thompson
Richard Alexander Tilley
John Francis Tippet, Jr.
De Quang Tran
Anthony Trice, Jr.
Glenn Tyndell
Benjamin Tyson
Name Unknown
Michael T. Ward, Jr.
Terrance Ivor Watts
Marquis Weems
Robert Lawrence White
Dominique Williams
Cedric Williams
Gary J. Willis
Matthew Wood, Jr.
Digno Ramon Yorro, Jr.
Lionel Young



*Reclaim MLK Day Rally,
2016. Marion Gray
Hopkins with a sign in
memory of her son, Gary
Hopkins, Jr.*

Endnotes

- ¹ U.S. Census Bureau, “QuickFacts: Maryland,” accessed April 2026, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MD/PST045223>
- ² This report includes deaths by officers who were off-duty at the time but were acting in a law enforcement capacity or who used their service weapon in a domestic situation. Excluded from this report are killings that occurred in a personal or domestic setting where the officer was acting as a private individual, was not using their service weapon, and had been suspended from duty at the time of the incident.
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- ⁴ Mapping Police Violence, “Police Violence Report,” accessed April 2026, <https://policeviolencereport.org/>
- ⁵ Maryland Office of Attorney General, “An Independent Audit of Restraint-Related Death Investigations at Maryland’s Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) from 2003-2019”, issued May 15, 2025, accessed April 2026, https://oag.maryland.gov/News/Documents/pdfs/051525_OCME_audit_report_FINAL.pdf
- ⁶ OCME determinations we considered improper are those in which there is clear evidence of significant force used by police, through physical evidence, video footage, or other documentation, but the cause of death was attributed to an unrelated or implausible factor. Examples include citing a discredited condition like excited delirium or a mental health diagnosis such as bipolar disorder, despite the evident use of force.
- ⁷ In addition to the seven people who died after being tased by police, an additional person (Jeffrey Evans) was tased and then killed shortly after by gunshot when three officers opened fire on him.
- ⁸ Maryland Governor’s Office of Crime Prevention and Policy, “Law Enforcement Reports: Deaths Involving a Law Enforcement Officer,” accessed April 2026, <https://gocpp.maryland.gov/crime-statistics/law-enforcement-reports/deaths-involving-law-enforcement/>
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- ¹¹ The Independent Investigations Division (IID) was formed in spring 2021 and made fully effective on October 1, 2023, as part of new police accountability laws. It investigates all fatal police encounters in Maryland from October 2021 onward. These investigations may result in recommendations for prosecution, but enforcement remains at the discretion of local authorities. Some law enforcement agencies have refused to comply with investigations, resulting in legal action. An archive of IID investigations is available at <https://oag.maryland.gov/resources-info/Pages/police-involved-incidents.aspx> (accessed April 2026).
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- ¹⁴ Anne Grauer, *Bodies of Evidence: Reconstructing History Through Skeletal Analysis* (New York: Wiley-Liss, 1995), 115.
- ¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, “Historical Census Statistics On Population Totals By Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities And Other Urban Places In The United States,” published 2005, accessed April 2026, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2005/demo/POP-twps0076.pdf>
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