

Voices from the Allentown protest

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing, Police July 14, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts responding to the George Floyd killing* 

from Michelle Merlin and Andrew Scott, “More than 200 march, demand change following video showing officer kneeling on man.” Morning Call, July 13, 2020.

More than 200 protesters gathered Monday evening in downtown Allentown in response to a Saturday night video, taken outside outside St. Luke’s Hospital-Sacred Heart, showing a police officer kneeling on a man’s head, near his neck.

Carrying banners stating “Black Lives Matter” and chanting “Defund the police” and “No justice, no peace,” the racially diverse crowd gathered at the Allentown Civil War memorial in response to what the video showed.

“I’m tired of this ...,” protester Rodney Bushe said to the crowd. “I’m tired of witnessing brothers and sisters with knees on their necks. I can’t breathe.”

They demanded the officer’s name, suspension and arrest; that police be defunded; an external investigation; and that elected officials either do more to end police officers’ unnecessary use of force or vacate their seats.

“These politicians try to act like we are savages who can’t manage ourselves,” said Arthur Benson, a member of the Lehigh Valley Black Lives Matter group and Action Town Activists. “We haven’t been allowed to have a seat at the table.”

Speakers at the event decried that police were violent toward a man vomiting outside a hospital who was in need of medical attention, not police force. They called for the city to defund the police and put the

money toward education, mental health services and social services instead.

Zahnia Richardson attended the protest and said she found the video of the man outside the hospital disheartening. She supports the idea of defunding the police.

“I feel like a lot of the issues you need police for stem from lack of education, lack of mental health support. You could take from police funding and put it toward [things like that],” she said.

Jimmeka Hernandez, who participated in the the protest, said the video upset her. She said her children saw it and asked if it was real life or a movie.

“We educate our kids that police aren’t the enemy, but there’s a lot of police officers that aren’t doing their jobs correctly,” she said.

The crowd took a knee when Chantel Jenkins, the mother of one of four teenagers [charged with inciting a riot during a January basketball game at Whitehall High School](#) spoke. She told protesters her “worst nightmare came true,” when she saw police arresting her son and taking him into custody.

The Allentown branch of the NAACP on Sunday night issued a statement saying the video was “concerning and disturbing.” They said that once the investigation into the incident is complete, they’ll have more discussions.

“As the Allentown Police Department works through their new police policy protocols, we want them to ensure us that they are acting in a manner of integrity that shows both respect and safety for its citizens,” they said in the statement. They did not attend the rally, Secretary Barbara Redmond said in an email.