

Recent news about troublesome “first contact” situations involving the police

The Bethlehem Gadfly Christian Hall, George Floyd killing February 5, 2021

 *Latest in a series of posts in the wake of the George Floyd murder* 

A police officer charged with murder, an hysterical 9-year-old pepper-sprayed, a suicidal man with his hands up killed, suits lodged.

Gadfly reminds you that evidence abounds that something is wrong in the way that police respond to mental health calls and other “first contact” situations.

We have been promised a Public Safety Committee meeting to discuss these kinds of things locally.

We are not that far from the first anniversary of George Floyd’s death, and we don’t have a lot to show for the introspection that tragedy should have invoked.

Yes, there’s a lot going on in the world — pandemics, insurrections, multiple impeachments, record-breaking storms . . . you name it, we seem to be suffering it.

And, yes, the Police Department has initiated a modest pilot program with the Health folk.

(By the way, we learned at the January 25 BASD meeting that police department involvement in the **“Handle with Care”** program has been very successful.)

Unfortunately, the politics of “defunding” ensnarl such discussion.

But this has nothing to do with politics, but simply recognizing that there is an obvious problem in police practice that needs to be discussed.

But time is passing, and election season might make this an uneasy subject to bring up.

*Will Wight, "Former Columbus Police Officer Is Charged With Murder." New York Times." February 3, 2021. [This is the **Andre Hill** case]*

A Columbus police officer who was fired after fatally shooting a Black man in December was arrested and charged with felony murder on Wednesday, Attorney General Dave Yost of Ohio announced.

The officer, Adam Coy, a 19-year veteran who is white, was also charged with felonious assault and two counts of dereliction of duty.

Mr. Coy shot Andre Hill four times after responding to a call about a suspicious vehicle. When he and another officer arrived at the scene, Mr. Coy found Mr. Hill in a garage and opened fire within seconds.

Mr. Yost said his office acted as a special prosecutor in the case, reviewing evidence, interviewing witnesses and presenting charges to a grand jury, which indicted Mr. Coy on Wednesday.

Tim Craig and K.J. Edelman," Mother of 9-year-old Rochester, N.Y. girl said police rebuffed her pleas for mental health help for her daughter." Washington Post, February 3, 2021.

The mother of the 9-year-old Rochester, N.Y., girl who was handcuffed and pepper-sprayed by police said Wednesday that she repeatedly told an officer that her daughter was having a mental health breakdown and she pleaded with them to call a specialist instead of trying to detain her.

The officer said "no," Elba Pope said.

Pope, 30, said the incident, which sparked nationwide outrage and prompted fresh scrutiny of how law enforcement agencies deal with people in emotional distress, has left her rattled and fearful that her daughter could suffer long-term emotional trauma.

"I was saying, 'We need mental health out there,'" Pope said in an interview. "He ignored me."

Molly Bilinski and Peter Hall, “Family of teen fatally shot by state police on Poconos overpass announce lawsuit, are being represented by civil rights attorney Benjamin Crump.” Morning Call, February 3, 2021.

“Christian Hall needed a helping hand, but yet he got bullets while he had his hands up,” said Benjamin L. Crump, the family’s attorney. ” ... When people have mental health crises, the police should de-escalate the situation, not settle it with a gun. That’s not what good policing is.”

At 1:38 p.m., state police responded to a report of a suicidal man and found Hall standing with a gun near the bridge, according to the agency. After speaking with Hall, troopers persuaded him to put the gun down, but he picked the gun back up and began walking toward the troopers, police said.

Police say Hall pointed the gun in their direction, and they shot him.

But, Crump and Jacob argue that Hall was standing with his hands up when officers shot him, and his killing “should never have happened.”

Hall was going through a breakup with his girlfriend, Crump said, and was suffering from mental health issues and could have been contemplating suicide.

A new video [\[linked in this article\]](#), recorded by a bystander during the incident and circulating on social media shows “Christian has his hands up — both hands — up in the air,” Jacob said.