



Ohio Attorney General's Office
Bureau of Criminal Investigation
Investigative Report



2021-0957
Officer Involved Critical Incident – 3171 Legion Lane, Columbus,
OH (L)

Investigative Activity: Interview with Witness
Involves: Officer Serge Akpalo (W)
Date of Activity: 04/28/2021
Activity Location: Akpalo, Officer Serge – Business – Substation 20, 2500 Park Crescent Drive, Columbus, OH 43232, Franklin County
Author: SA Jonathan W. Jenkins, #99

Narrative:

On April 28, 2021 at approximately 1454 hours, Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation Special Agent Jonathan Jenkins met with Columbus Police Department (CPD) Officer Serge Akpalo (Akpalo), at CPD Substation 20. Jenkins spoke with Akpalo in order to ask him questions related to the Officer Involved Critical Incident (OICI) between CPD Officer Nicholas Reardon and Ma'khia Bryant. On April 20, 2021, Akpalo and CPD Officer Eric Channel responded to 3171 Legion Lane, Columbus, Ohio, in reference to a disturbance at the residence. Reardon was initially dispatched to the call and Akpalo along with Channel served as backup officers. Upon arriving at the scene, Reardon allegedly observed Bryant holding a knife and attempting to stab another person. Reardon drew his service firearm and discharged multiple rounds at Bryant, striking her upper body. Bryant later died as a result of her injuries.

Upon meeting with Akpalo, Jenkins properly identified himself and requested permission to speak with him. Akpalo agreed and the interview took place in a conference room at Substation 20. Also present during the interview was Akpalo's Fraternal Order of Police Attorney Kate Harshman. Prior to asking Akpalo any questions Jenkins explained to him the interview was part of a criminal investigation, which Jenkins was assisting in conducting. Akpalo was advised he did not have to answer any questions and could stop at any time. Akpalo stated he understood and the interview continued.

Jenkins started the interview by asking Akpalo about his background and training as it relates to law enforcement. Akpalo stated he graduated from the CPD Police Academy in June of 2014 and had no previous law enforcement experience. Akpalo is currently assigned to road patrol duties at Substation 20 and his badge number is 2598. On the day of the OICI, Akpalo was assigned to patrol vehicle 200, which is a Ford Explorer, equipped with external emergency lights and the standard markings of most other CPD vehicles. Akpalo stated the emergency lights were not activated during the incident. Akpalo added that on the day of the incident,

This document is the property of the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation and is confidential in nature. Neither the document nor its contents are to be disseminated outside your agency except as provided by law – a statute, an administrative rule, or any rule of procedure.

patrol vehicle 200 was a two officer car where he was the passenger and Channel was the driver. Akpalo is currently working the shift starting at 1400 hours and ending at 2200 hours, with days off on Friday and Saturdays. Akpalo reported being well rested before his shift started and had not worked any extra duty hours prior to the beginning of his shift. In addition, Akpalo had not consumed any alcoholic beverages in the 24 hours prior to his shift and is not currently taking any prescription medication that could interfere with the performance of his duties. Akpalo does not wear glasses, contacts, or have any physical impairments. Akpalo also stated he was not injured during the OICI. During the incident Akpalo was dressed in the standardized CPD road patrol uniform and was carrying his normal duty belt. Akpalo's duty belt equipment is all departmental issued and includes: Smith and Wesson M&P 9mm firearm, 2 spare magazines loaded to capacity, taser, handcuffs, chemical spray, and a baton. Akpalo was equipped with a body worn camera, which he did activate prior to arriving at the scene, in order to record the incident. Akpalo stated after the incident, his camera was turned over to personnel inside the mobile command center, which was summoned to the scene. Akpalo also reported he never removed his duty firearm from the holster or any other equipment during the incident.

Jenkins then asked Akpalo to describe what he observed or remembered during the OICI. Akpalo stated he remembered finishing up a call for service in the area of Brice Road and Tussing Road, when the call was dispatched to Reardon. Akpalo stated after hearing Reardon being dispatched to Legion Lane, he and Channel added themselves to the call in order to provide backup. Akpalo stated he and Channel then started towards Legion Lane and as they turned off of Old Refugee Road, they observed Reardon parked towards the end of Legion Lane. Akpalo said as they pulled up behind Reardon, all three officers traveled to the residence together. Akpalo stated as they pulled up to the residence, at 3171 Legion Lane, he and Channel stopped directly behind Reardon's patrol vehicle. Prior to exiting his patrol vehicle, Akpalo reported seeing a black female, later identified as Bryant, run from the house towards another female standing near the sidewalk and knock her down to the ground. Akpalo exited his patrol vehicle and immediately observed and heard several people arguing. Akpalo said as he approached the residence he heard Reardon shoot his firearm and then observed Bryant on the ground, along the side of a vehicle parked in the driveway. Jenkins asked Akpalo if he ever observed a knife in Bryant's hand. Akpalo stated he never saw a knife until after the shots were fired. Jenkins asked Akpalo if he un-holstered his duty firearm or any other equipment on his duty belt. Akpalo stated he did not, because he never observed a threat. Akpalo described his point of view to the altercation between Reardon and Bryant as being blocked, because he was standing behind Reardon when the shots were fired. Akpalo further explained, after the shots were fired by Reardon, he observed Reardon lower his firearm, which indicated there was no additional threat.

Akpalo stated after the threat was no longer apparent he and Channel approached Bryant who was on the ground. Akpalo observed Channel start pulling out his gloves and kneel down beside Bryant. Akpalo then notified dispatch to send emergency medical personnel to the scene. Akpalo stated CPD Officer Estep also arrived at the scene and started to assist Channel in providing first aid to Bryant. At this time, Akpalo starting identifying potential witnesses to the OICI and secured them in the three patrol vehicles at the residence.

Jenkins asked Akpalo if he ever heard Reardon provide any type of verbal commands. Akpalo

stated he did hear Reardon advising Bryant to "get down." Jenkins asked Akpalo if Bryant listened to Reardon's commands. Akpalo stated he did not see any pause in Bryant's actions. Jenkins asked Akpalo if he felt Reardon did anything wrong. Akpalo stated no, not after learning Bryant had a knife and was attempting to stab another person. Jenkins asked Akpalo if he ever observed the knife Bryant was holding. Akpalo stated he did and described it as a longer kitchen type knife. Jenkins asked Akpalo if he considered the knife as a weapon. Akpalo stated he did consider the knife to be a weapon.

Jenkins asked Akpalo if he felt race was an issue in Reardon discharging his firearm at Bryant. Akpalo stated he did not think race was an issue, because he did not see any evidence of race being a factor. Akpalo also stated the incident happened so quickly and the fact he has worked with Reardon in the past and never knew Reardon to exert any type of racial behavior. In addition, Akpalo stated he had never heard Reardon use racial terminology or make any type of inappropriate comments related to race. Jenkins asked Akpalo, if he witnessed any CPD officers do anything inappropriate, would he even report it to Jenkins. Akpalo stated he would. Jenkins asked Akpalo if he had been on any prior calls for service at 3171 Legion Lane. Akpalo stated no, not that he remembered. Jenkins asked if ever heard other officers at the Substation talk about being at a call for service at 3171 Legion Lane. Akpalo stated no.

The interview between Jenkins, Akpalo, and Harshman was audio recorded and can be reviewed for additional details. See attachment 1 for a copy of the audio recorded interview.

Attachments:

Attachment # 01:Serge Akpalo, audio recorded interview, 4-28-21