

<https://www.facebook.com/BlendonTwpPolice/>

## CHIEF'S FOLLOW-UP STATEMENT (9/1/23) ON DEPARTMENT'S FACEBOOK PAGE

### Statement From Blendon Twp. Police Chief John Belford

Last week, there was a tragedy in our community. In a parking lot outside a local grocery store, a theft suspect drove her car into one of my officers and the officer fired a single shot through the windshield. She was struck by the bullet and later died.

I immediately requested the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) to conduct an independent investigation into the incident. As a result, our department has no role in that investigation, and we will defer any policy or employee discipline review until BCI has completed its work.

I placed the officer who fired the shot on administrative leave. Out of an abundance of caution, I also placed the other officer on administrative leave.

Less than 24 hours later, I released a detailed video statement explaining the facts of what happened. We sent it to the news media and posted it on social media, where it was viewed by thousands of people. Many agencies refuse to issue comments following a use of force incident, but I wanted the community to know the basic details as soon as they could be verified.

Over last weekend, our department of 14 sworn officers worked on behind the scenes efforts to ensure that two planned demonstrations could be held safely for all involved. Thankfully, the demonstrations were peaceful and grieving voices could be heard.

I also took several other steps:

1. I asked our legal team to begin preparing the body camera videos (one from each of the two officers) for release. We did not provide a precise estimate of a particular release date to anyone, as we were unsure of how long it would take to make the countless redactions and undergo the required legal review.
2. We contacted BCI to ensure that our planned release of the body camera videos would not interfere with their investigation.

3. I continued to speak with the grandmother of Ms. Young to assure her that she and the family would see the video before it was released publicly. Our attorney also reached out and had a discussion with the family attorney.

4. With respect to any security camera footage from the grocery store, I deferred any action on release of that to BCI, as it is their investigation and in their possession.

5. I learned from our legal team that provisions of the Ohio Constitution and state law require us to withhold the identity and identifying features of crime victims absent a waiver. In this case, there are three possible crime victims:

a. Ta'Kiya Young (depending on decisions of BCI and prosecutors). Her family's attorney and the Franklin County Coroner have already publicly identified her, which waives any redactions of Ms. Young's identity.

b. Officer #1. When Ms. Young drove her car directly at Officer #1, striking him, Officer #1 became a victim of attempted vehicular assault. Because Ms. Young is deceased, charges obviously cannot be filed, but – under state law – the crime victim status of Officer #1 remains.

c. Officer #2. When Ms. Young pulled away from Officer #2 while his hand and part of his arm was still in the driver's side window, Officer #2 became a victim of misdemeanor assault. Because Ms. Young is deceased, charges obviously cannot be filed but – under state law – the crime victim status of Office #2 remains.

Because the officers have not expressly waived their rights as a victim of crime, the department must follow state law and has redacted their identities and identifying attributes. Due to the fact that there were two body cameras that were constantly in motion and there were numerous reflective surfaces showing the faces of the two officers, redaction was extremely complex. This, combined with the legal review, took a great deal of time for our small department.

6. The redactions made on the video we released today were made pursuant to R.C. 149.43(A)(17), R.C. 2930.07(D) and Article I, Section 10(a) of the Ohio Constitution.

7. After reviewing the videos, I saw no reason to keep Officer #2 on administrative leave. I returned him to duty, as our staffing is already very limited, and we must continue to protect and serve our township.

Some have asked why it took so long to release these videos. As previously mentioned, the redaction process and legal review was complicated and time-consuming. I also

wanted to have an outside expert review the video and provide context for the viewer. I asked Russ Martin to do so. He is the former Delaware County Sheriff and the former Chief of the City of Delaware Police Department. With four decades of experience, he is one of the most respected law enforcement experts in the state. I asked Sheriff Martin to review the videos and make observations and provide contextual comments. We specifically asked him to avoid drawing any conclusions about whether the use of deadly force was legally justified, as that decision belongs to other agencies.

8. Because I may be involved in a potential personnel action review involving Officer #1 (following the BCI review) I decided it would be more appropriate for an outside expert such as Sheriff Martin to narrate the analysis video.

9. I'm aware that a few people on the internet have made false and misleading statements about the medical response to treat Ms. Young. But here are the facts:

a. 10 seconds after officers got Ms. Young out of the car, Officer 1 called for EMS.

b. 10 seconds later, Officer #1 sprinted back to his car to get a trauma kit and wound seal and then sprinted back and began to use it to stop bleeding.

c. 68 seconds after Ms. Young is out of the car, Officer 1 sprints back from his car and applies a chest seal to her wound in an effort to stop the bleeding.

d. 90 seconds after Ms. Young is out of the car, an ER physician approaches the officers and begins to help with medical attention.

e. 9 minutes after receiving the call, EMS arrived on the scene and took over the treatment of Ms. Young.

10. This was a tragedy. Ms. Young's family is understandably very upset and grieving. While none of us can fully understand the depths of their pain, all of us can remember them in our prayers and give them the time and space to deal with this heartbreaking turn of events.

11. A lawsuit is very likely to be filed about this incident. There may be other legal proceedings as well. That's why we're very limited in what we can say. We're being as transparent and forthcoming as we can, given these significant legal constraints. As a result, we don't anticipate making any further statements until official actions are taken.