

## **Salinas Police Chief Kelly McMillin's Remarks on the DA's Finding in the Carlos Mejia Investigation**

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Salinas Police Department, Salinas, California

I want to start today by emphasizing once again the most important fact in any officer-involved shooting, or in any incident that involves the loss of a life: A human being died, and that is a tragedy.

The death of Carlos Mejia was a tragedy for him, for the people who loved him, for the officers involved, and for our community.

Independent of whether his death was legally justified, we have — and will continue to — constantly search for ways to reduce violence and the loss of life, no matter what the circumstances.

I also want to emphasize this once again: Police use of force should not be used — and in our department it is not used — to punish people, because they — quote — "deserved it". Mr. Mejia had just assaulted a woman, who called 911 in fear for her life. But that in itself is not a justification for his being shot.

No matter what Mr. Mejia had done, he was not shot because he deserved it. What he deserved, like everyone in the United States would deserve, was a fair trial, and to get help if he needed it. Unfortunately, Mr. Mejia's actions prevented that from happening.

Use of force is judged not based on what the suspect deserved, but by what was needed to stop someone and make an arrest under the circumstances.

As the District Attorney points out in his very detailed letter to me, Mr. Mejia was posing a very serious threat to the public and to the officers who were lawfully attempting to arrest him.

I also understand that many people think officers should not have used lethal force against Mr. Mejia because he was intoxicated and/or mentally ill. Salinas Police Officers contact intoxicated and mentally ill people every day, and very rarely use any amount of force at all. Lethal force was used against Mr. Mejia to stop the immediate threat he posed to members of the public and to the officers. In the critical moments of this encounter, the *reason* for Mr. Mejia's conduct had to be secondary to the danger he posed to the community.

If it had been possible to establish a secure perimeter around Mr. Mejia, we would have talked with him as long as it took to arrest him peacefully. Had Mr. Mejia surrendered his weapon as he was told to do repeatedly, we could have arrested him peacefully. We have hundreds of encounters with intoxicated or mentally ill people every year. Almost all of them end peacefully.

I would like to point out that this case is still pending review by the United States Department of Justice, a review I requested because some in the community expressed concerns that this case was a violation of Mr. Mejia's civil rights. I do not know how long that review will take. We are also

continuing to work closely with the Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services Collaborative Reform program to improve community relations, ensure our use of force and training practices and current and improve trust between the police department and the people we serve.

As I said at the outset, while the shooting of Carlos Mejia was justified, it was a tragedy. We will continue to seek ways of reducing all violence in our community, especially by working with our community partners to address the underlying *causes* of violence. Force is a last resort that we don't want to use. We hope that the day will come when we never have to use it.

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