

N.C. Trooper Investigated in Fatal Shooting of Deaf Motorist

 [nytimes.com/2016/08/25/us/nc-trooper-being-investigated-for-shooting-of-deaf-man.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/25/us/nc-trooper-being-investigated-for-shooting-of-deaf-man.html)

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Vigil for Deaf Man Shot by Police

Family and friends held a vigil for Daniel Kevin Harris, a deaf man shot dead after a North Carolina state trooper tried to pull him over. State officials are investigating.

By REUTERS on August 24, 2016. . [Watch in Times Video »](#)
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The North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation is conducting a criminal inquiry into the fatal shooting of a deaf motorist by a state trooper last week. The death has raised questions about the use of deadly force by police officers and about how they interact with the disabled.

The motorist, Daniel K. Harris, 29, was shot and killed by the trooper, Jermaine Saunders, just after 6 p.m. last Thursday after Mr. Harris failed to pull over during a traffic stop near Charlotte, Sgt. Michael Baker, a spokesman for the state's highway patrol, said in a statement.

"After a brief pursuit," Sergeant Baker said, "the driver exited his vehicle, and an encounter took place between the driver and the trooper, causing a shot to be fired. The driver succumbed to his injuries at the scene."

The authorities declined to provide any further information about the nature of the encounter between Mr. Harris, who was white, and Trooper Saunders, who is black, or to say whether the trooper believed his life was in danger before he opened fire.



An image of Daniel Kevin Harris from a YouTube video. CBSnews, via YouTube

Investigators have not commented on what role Mr. Harris's disability may have played, but his brother said he believed his death was the product of a police department that does not know how to interact with those who are deaf or hard of hearing.

"Being shot by the police is just not acceptable," the victim's brother, Sam Harris, who is also deaf, said through an interpreter during a video interview with Reuters. "If the officer had known that he was deaf, it would have ended differently, and he would still be around with family, and life would be going on. He'd be happy."

But on Tuesday, Frank L. Perry, secretary of the North Carolina Department of Public Safety, urged the public to "refrain from making assumptions or drawing conclusions prior to the internal and independent reviews."

"Any loss of life regardless of the circumstances is truly a tragic and sad event for all involved," he said in a statement. "While the Highway Patrol, the State Bureau of Investigation and the district attorney's office conduct their respective reviews, we are keeping all those affected by this tragedy in our thoughts and prayers."

Jay Ruderman, the president of the [Ruderman Family Foundation](#), which works for the rights of people with disabilities, said police departments needed to train officers to respond to the needs of the disabled.

"People with disabilities will be safer the more the police are properly trained in this regard, and it needs to happen now before more tragedies occur," Mr. Ruderman said in a statement.

“Whether a person is deaf, autistic or has a chronic health problem, these disabilities are often not understood by police officers when encountering them on the streets.”

Investigators from the bureau of investigation interviewed Trooper Saunders on Tuesday night and planned to meet with Mecklenburg County’s district attorney, R. Andrew Murray, in the coming days, said Shannon O’Toole, a spokesman for the bureau. He said Trooper Saunders had been placed on administrative leave.

The agency investigates 90 to 95 percent of the officer-involved shootings in the state, Mr. O’Toole said, and when it “is requested to conduct an officer-involved shooting investigation, we do so, with the intent that each and every case is going to trial.”

The Associated Press reported on Wednesday that since 2008 Mr. Harris had been charged with traffic offenses and other misdemeanors, including petty theft, in Connecticut, Florida and Colorado. In 2010, he pleaded guilty to speeding in Florida and also pleaded guilty to interfering with or resisting the police in Connecticut, The A.P. said.