

Chicago Police Fatally Shoot 2, Raising New Questions for a Force Under Scrutiny

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By MONICA DAVEY

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Evelyn Glover-Jennings holds a picture of her cousin Bettie Jones, 55, who was shot by the Chicago police on Saturday. Joshua Lott for The New York Times

CHICAGO — The police fatally shot a man and a woman on Chicago’s West Side early Saturday, setting off a new flurry of questions about a department already under intense scrutiny.

News releases from the department said officers had been answering a call about a domestic disturbance in the 4700 block of West Erie Street at 4:25 a.m. on Saturday when they were “confronted by a combative subject, resulting in the discharging of the officer’s weapon.” The woman was “accidentally struck,” the police said.

The authorities provided few other details, but family members of those killed said that the shooting raised concerns about how officers are trained to handle people with mental illnesses, and about the use of weapons when people uninvolved in a confrontation may be nearby.

The police arrived at a small beige residence in a neighborhood about six miles west of

downtown after a relative reported that Quintonio LeGrier, 19, was behaving oddly and carrying a metal bat around the second-floor apartment where his father lived. Mr. LeGrier, whose mother told reporters he was a college student who had been experiencing mental health problems, was fatally shot.

Bettie Jones, 55, a first-floor tenant, was also fatally shot, apparently by accident, as she tried to answer a shared front door for the arriving officers. On Saturday night, the department extended “its deepest condolences to the victim’s family and friends.” She may have been standing near Mr. LeGrier as shots were fired, her brother, Melvin Jones, said.

“None of this needed to happen,” Mr. Jones said as relatives gathered hours later in the house to mourn and pray. “And they say there will be an investigation into the shooting? I already know how that will turn out. We all know how that will turn out. When is this going to end?”

The practices of the Chicago Police Department, the nation’s second-largest after New York City’s, is the subject of a Justice Department review after the release last month of a video showing a white police officer fatally shooting Laquan McDonald, a black 17-year-old, in 2014. The video, which the city fought for months to keep private, set off weeks of protests over race and policing here.



One of Ms. Jones's daughters, left, is hugged outside the apartment where she was shot. Joshua Lott for The New York Times

It prompted Mayor Rahm Emanuel to remove the heads of the police force and of the city’s Independent Police Review Authority, which investigates police shootings.

The authority, which has found claims of wrongdoing against officers to be valid in only two police shootings out of more than 400 since 2007, is reviewing the latest case, the Chicago police said. A spokesman for the police directed further inquiries to the authority.

An authority spokesman said that an investigation was in progress, but that it would be premature to provide further details, including the number of shots fired or the officers' names.

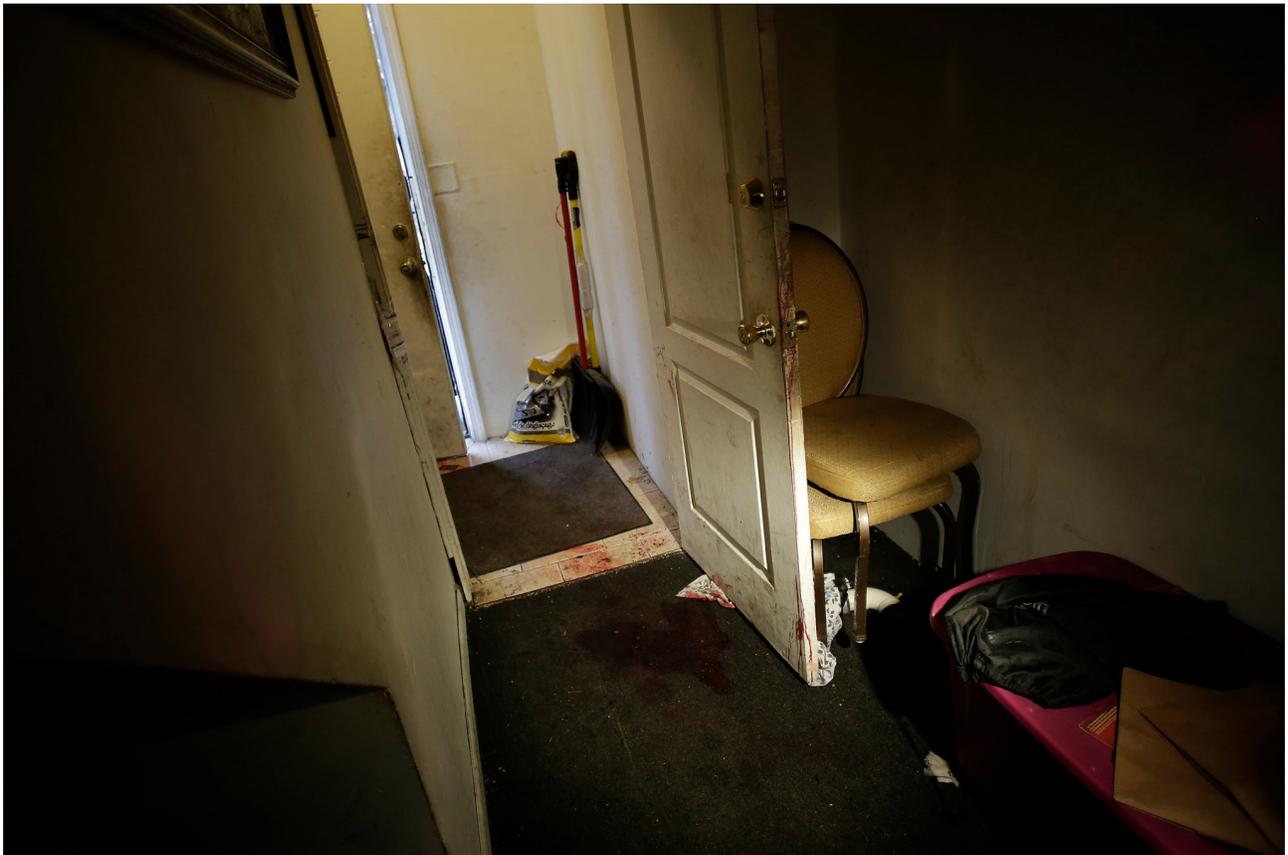
Hours later, on Saturday afternoon, the police here were involved in a second shooting, this time in the Washington Heights neighborhood on the city's South Side.

Police said they were responding to an "assault in progress" call when they came upon a man with a gun. An officer shot the man, who was in surgery at an area hospital on Saturday night, the police said.

"I understand that you all, and all Chicagoans, are anxious for answers as to what happened here, and we will provide any and all information at the appropriate time, but now I just thank you in advance and I ask for your patience," Sharon Fairley, the newly named acting chief administrator of the review authority, said at the scene of the second shooting.

In the fatal shooting earlier, Ms. Jones and Mr. LeGrier (whose name some officials said might have been capitalized differently, as Legrier) were both black. The Police Department did not reveal the identities or races of the officers involved.

Over a five-year period ending in 2014, officers here fatally shot 70 people, most of them black. That was the most among the nation's 10 largest cities during the same period, according to the Better Government Association, a nonprofit watchdog group.



Blood stains in the entrance to a Chicago apartment where police officers fatally shot two people on Saturday. Joshua Lott for The New York Times

Family members of Mr. LeGrier and Ms. Jones said their deaths raised questions about the police's handling of mental illness and about de-escalation training.

Some of them wondered aloud why a stun gun or backup help from other officers would not have been enough to manage an apparently volatile man with a baseball bat.

"It's like you call for help and you lose someone," Janet Cooksey, Mr. LeGrier's mother, told the WGN television station. "And that has to stop."

Ms. Jones's boyfriend, who asked not to be named, said that he had been present when the shooting occurred, and that Ms. Jones had gotten up from bed to open a front door — shared by the first and second floors — for arriving police officers. He said Mr. LeGrier's father, who is also the landlord for the building, had telephoned Ms. Jones from the second floor to alert her that the police were on their way and needed to be let in.

He said that when the officers arrived, Mr. LeGrier seemed to have rushed to the bottom of the stairs with his bat at nearly the same time Ms. Jones was opening the door.

"Then the shooting just started coming — bam, bam, bam!" he said. What appeared to be one bullet left a hole in the wall of a first-floor foyer wall, a bedroom and a bathroom, traveling all the way to Ms. Jones's kitchen, where she had celebrated Christmas with some of her five grown children hours earlier.

“If you came here to her house, she took care of you, whoever you were,” Melvin Jones said of his sister, who grew up on the West Side of Chicago and worked at a baking company.

“She was everybody’s mama,” he said. “I’m not mad, but I’m hurt.”