

Prosecutors: St. Paul cops justified in killing man in August

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Family of William "Billy" Hughes stand outside the fence to the home where William was shot and killed by police on Aug. 5, 2018. Chris Juhn for MPR News

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St. Paul police officers were justified in [shooting and killing William "Billy" Hughes](#) on the front porch of his home last August as they responded to a report of a man firing shots in the house, the Ramsey County Attorney's Office said Friday.

The use of deadly force by officers Vincent Adams and Matthew Jones was "objectively reasonable given all of the circumstances that they knew, heard and saw before firing their weapons," Ramsey County Attorney John Choi wrote in a memo describing his decision not to seek charges.

"The body camera footage that captured the death of William Hughes is traumatic and difficult to watch," he added. "This tragedy is something all of us wish had never happened."

Hughes, 43, was killed early Sunday morning, Aug. 5. A 911 caller reported at about 2:30 a.m. that someone had fired multiple shots on the second floor of house on the 900 block of St. Anthony Avenue in the city's Summit-University neighborhood. The 911 caller then hung up without providing additional information.

When the officers arrived, they found Hughes with a gun. The officers shot 21 rounds, and he was pronounced dead at the scene.

St. Paul police later released [officer body cam video](#) from the shooting amid [protests from Native American and other activists](#) who demanded charges against the officers.

The body cam videos showed the officers walking up to the first floor of the two-story home, with their guns drawn and flashlights shining into the porch. On Adams' body cam video, he can be heard knocking on the door. The officers don't identify themselves or say police at that point. A voice inside can be heard saying: "I will kill you ..." on the video.

Hughes opens the interior door and the officers say "Police, hands up." Hughes steps onto the porch and turns and faces the officers. Both officers can be heard yelling: "Put your hands up, Put your hands up." A gun can be seen in Hughes' right hand. He then can be seen raising his right hand.

According to an accompanying memo released Friday by the Ramsey County Attorney's Office:

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Video from the officers' BWCs shows that Mr. Hughes also did not comply with the officers' orders to put his gun down. Instead, the video shows Mr. Hughes raise his right hand while still holding the gun. Mr. Hughes does not raise his left arm and hand.

Both officers can be heard on the audio from their BWC continuing to loudly order Mr. Hughes to "put it down."

Mr. Hughes raised his right hand while holding the gun in a sweeping trajectory that momentarily was pointed at the officers. Believing that Mr. Hughes is about to fire at them, both officers fired a total of 21 rounds at Mr. Hughes.

Both officers estimated they were standing approximately 7-10 feet away from Mr. Hughes at the time of the shooting. Mr. Hughes fell to the ground near where he stood and his .45 caliber HiPoint semi-automatic handgun fell into a nearby cardboard box.

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The memo also said the BCA traced the source of the 911 call to a man who was a friend of Hughes who'd been sharing the second floor room in the house for several months and told investigators that minutes before he called 911, Hughes had fired two shots into the wall without warning and then put the gun barrel to his friend's head asking, "How many rounds do you think are left in this gun?"

Choi said his decision not to charge the officers came after reviewing evidence collected by the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension and from the opinions of two outside experts asked to review the case.

"The officers' actions preceding and during the fatal encounter," he added, "are consistent with commonly-accepted police practices and training.

One of the outside experts, Mike Quinn, a former police officer who has [testified for the prosecution](#) in use-of-force cases, said the officers did "what they had to do.

"They backed up when they knew the guy was coming from that porch and tried to create some distance which would have given them a little bit bigger safety factor," Quinn said. "And certainly, they could have shot sooner."

St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter issued a statement Friday saying he supports Choi's decision after a "thorough, transparent and timely investigation."

Carter called the shooting a tragedy that "has touched our entire city," but said "officers must make split-second decisions without the benefits of rewind or instant replay. No training nor de-escalation technique could have guaranteed a peaceful resolution to the terrifying scene portrayed on body cam footage."

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