

MINNEAPOLIS

# Noor trial: Fellow officers told Noor to keep quiet, contacted union officials

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Minneapolis police officers tasked with watching two colleagues involved in the fatal shooting of Justine Ruszczyk Damond offered them unsolicited advice to keep quiet, contacted union officials on their behalf and turned a squad camera off before the shooter was seated inside the vehicle, according to evidence presented in court Thursday.

Testimony and body camera videos played in the murder trial of former Minneapolis police officer Mohamed Noor showed a chaotic scene where many first responders were not informed that Damond had been killed by an officer, even as they tried to investigate her death. The head of Minneapolis Police Department's homicide unit arrived at the location and found himself confused by the sight of a barefoot woman lying under a white sheet with no weapons nearby.

"I didn't see anything, and my first thought, frankly, was, 'What the [expletive]? Why isn't there something here?'" homicide Lt. Richard Zimmerman testified. "You're looking for things that add up."

Noor fatally shot Damond from inside his squad car on July 15, 2017, while he and his partner, Matthew Harrity, were responding to her 911 call about a possible sexual assault in the alley behind her south Minneapolis home.

Body camera video from officer Jesse Lopez, one of the first officers at the scene, was played in court, showing officer Mark Ringgenberg walking Noor up to Lopez's squad. Thursday marked the first day body camera video was played in the trial.

"Mo," Lopez said in the video, using a nickname for Noor, "hang on. We gotta shut [the squad camera] off ... all right, kiddo."

Noor appeared briefly in the video raising a hand to his forehead. He did not speak.

"Just keep to yourself," Lopez told Noor. "Keep your mouth shut until you have to say anything to anybody."

Assistant Hennepin County Attorney Amy Sweasy asked Lopez why he wanted to turn off the squad camera and why he told Noor to stay quiet.

Lopez said it was apparent that it was an officer-involved shooting, and that other representatives could better serve Noor when he wanted to speak about what happened.

Ringgenberg sat in Lopez's car with Noor for 30 minutes.

Lopez's video showed him walking away from his squad as Noor's supervisor, Sgt. Shannon Barnette, approached.

"I'm goin' off," Lopez said in the video as he turned off his body camera before speaking with Barnette.

"Was there some reason you did not want that recorded?" Sweasy asked.

Lopez said it was common for officers to turn off body cameras when speaking with each other.

Prosecutors have told jurors to pay attention to how body cameras were used at the scene, and that Barnette turned hers off when she spoke with Noor about the shooting.



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Former Minneapolis police officer Mohamed



Justine Ruszczyk Damond

Ringgenberg testified Tuesday that he had tried to turn his body camera on while driving to the scene, but it failed to activate, which he did not discover until much later. He said it was not intentional.

Ringgenberg testified that he and his partner, officer Tom Fahey, were the first to arrive at the scene after a call for backup was sent over police radio. They saw Noor and Harrity performing CPR on Damond.

“Which way did he go?” Ringgenberg recalled Fahey asking about a suspect in the shooting. (Fahey has not testified yet.)

Harrity pointed at Noor, Ringgenberg said.

Ringgenberg removed Noor from the scene and placed him in his squad before later transferring him to Lopez’s squad.

“I just told [Noor] not to say anything,” Ringgenberg said. “I don’t remember specifics.”

Under questioning by Assistant Hennepin County Attorney Patrick Lofton, Ringgenberg said it was department policy that officers involved in a critical event to refrain from recounting the events to other officers at the scene. (Zimmerman testified earlier in the day that supervisors are allowed to ask some basic questions in such cases.)

Noor repeatedly asked if Damond would be OK, Ringgenberg testified. When paramedics and firefighters left the scene without Damond, Noor asked, “What’s going on?” according to Ringgenberg.

“I said, ‘They’re not transporting her,’” Ringgenberg testified. “He seemed upset.”

Ringgenberg said he called at least two union officials on Noor’s behalf. Lopez, who sat with Harrity in another squad, testified that he left a message for one union representative.

Sweasy asked if they were asked to call union leaders.

“No,” Lopez said.

Lopez said he also told Harrity to stay quiet.

Body camera footage recorded by Minneapolis police officer Scott Aikins, Lopez’s partner, was played in court earlier in the day showing his perspective of the lifesaving measures as he held gauze to Damond’s wound. The 25-minute clip ended with Aikins clueless about how she was shot.

“I have no [expletive] clue, but she’s gone,” Aikins said to someone asking him about the circumstances of the shooting.

In the video, Aikins asked about the investigation after lifesaving measures were stopped, but didn’t appear to receive an answer.

“Are we lookin’ around for a gun here, do we know?” Aikins asked.

Zimmerman testified that Barnette told him that Damond was “probably a drunk or a drug addict.” Tests revealed no drugs or alcohol in Damond’s body.

Despite defense contentions that lighting was poor in the alley, Zimmerman said he could see the scene clearly, as the streetlight next to the squad illuminated the vehicle and Damond.

“I could see the officers that were there. I could see the victim just like I’m looking at you right now,” he told Sweasy.

Zimmerman also testified that Barnette and a lieutenant at the scene said something must have hit the squad before the shooting, but “they were surmising, I guess.”

Noor faces charges of second-degree murder with intent, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter. Testimony continues Friday.



Former Minneapolis police officer, Mohamed Noor, left, left the Hennepin County Government Center Friday, March 1, 2019, in Minneapolis with

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