

Community Members, City Leaders Search for Answers in June 5 Arrest

A [squad car video](#) of a confrontation between a Champaign city police officer and a local African American youth has raised serious concerns about the relationship between the CPD and high ranking city officials in the last week. The comprehensiveness of the News-Gazette's reporting on the topic has also been called into question.

The video depicts two acts of force by a Champaign city police officer taken against a reasonably compliant youth who is initially stopped for jaywalking on Green Street at around 2:30 AM. In response to repeated inquiries as to the reasons for his detainment, the young man is pepper sprayed and put in handcuffs. He is put into the back seat of the arresting officer's squad car and taken to a nearby parking lot, where the officer then exits the car and demands identification. In response to the arrestee's further requests for fair treatment, the police officer tackles him while putting his hands around the handcuffed young man's neck.

The video was anonymously released to the public via WRFU's [The Show](#) on Sunday, November 20th. Champaign's city manager Steve Carter, who has the final say in the review process for police use of force, held a [press conference](#) that same day. He claimed he had first seen the video the week before and called it “troubling,” adding that he had asked the Illinois State Police to review the CPD's reports. He also said he was “surprised” that the initial police report “didn't have more information... They didn't have witness statements attached to it.” Carter did not mention that the video had been released to the public.

Also on the 20th, the News-Gazette published a [front page article](#) on the incident. The article features a lengthy statement from Mark Lipton, then the defense attorney for the young man. It also reports that Champaign County State's Attorney Julia Rietz had seen the video “earlier this month” and had subsequently decided to dismiss the felony charge of resisting a peace officer. At no point is the release of the video on Youtube mentioned in the article.

Two days later, the Tuesday after the video was leaked, more reactions to the incident and subsequent outcry surfaced. The ISP review was summarized in a [press release](#) published at 6:08pm. The ISP notes that

Champaign Police Department policy states that the use of OC spray "is intended to be used primarily against unarmed subjects who officers reasonably believe have indicated physically and/or verbally that they intend to resist arrest or assault an officer or other person."

It further claims that the youth was “disrupting traffic,” that the CPD officer merely “directed the group to relocate,” and that the young man became “combative,” despite the fact that none of these claims is clearly substantiated in the video.

Indeed, at 7:30 the City of Champaign issued a [News Release](#) in which it unequivocally disagreed with the ISP's conclusion. In the statement the City says that the ISP “did not go far enough.” It goes on to announce that the City is in communication with the FBI, which is expected to “conduct a full review and assessment of this incident,” as well as the City's intention to hire “an independent firm to complete a thorough review of the Use of Force Policy and Training.”

At about the the same time Champaign County State's Attorney, Julia Rietz, issued a statement

confirming that she would be dismissing to charges against the arrestee, explaining that “everyone other than the two foot patrol officers made bad decisions.” Despite making this admission, she also has refused to charge the arresting officer with any crime, although he is clearly seen taking unnecessary physical action against a handcuffed youth.

Prior to the release of ISP's report, the Illinois Fraternal Order of Police's (IFOP) Labor Council also made a [statement](#) on the developing situation. They are the only organization covered by the News-Gazette which mentioned the public availability of the video, although they erroneously claim that “members of the public” had “base[d] their opinions on a snippet of a video that was actually nearly an hour long,” when the entire 53 minute clip had thousands of views on Youtube (as of this writing the [full clip has more than 13,000 views](#)). The IFOP dismisses the citizens who they serve, claiming that they “have absolutely no police or use of force training.” They further assert that “the officer had to use force” the purpose of which was “to inflict pain in order to gain compliance and control.” Finally, the IFOP representative seeks to stifle public discourse, concluding the statement by saying that “publicly criticizing the officer only serves to divide the community and demoralize a professional and nationally recognized police department.”

Hours after the IFOP, ISP and City commentary was released by the News-Gazette, the newspaper published a [public statement](#) from Mayor Don Gerard. In it, he calls the ISP investigation “unacceptable,” adding that although the officer's actions may have been technically within the standards set by the CPD use of force policy, he thought many officers would have handled the situation differently.

Meanwhile, starting at the same time as the News-Gazette began rolling out commentary from the top of the Champaign city government, community members had gathered to discuss their responses to the video, as well as to the systemic police harassment of African American youth in Champaign. Clergy, business interests, youth and parents sat in the sanctuary of Salem Baptist Church, where after an extended period of public comment they ratified a document that reads as follows:

**Black Community of Champaign, Illinois
Town Hall Meeting on Police Brutality,
November 22, 2011**

List of Demands

- We urge a federal rather than a state level investigation of the June 5, 2011 incident. Because of the close relationship between the state and the Champaign Police Department we have no faith in a state investigation.
- We urge the State's Attorney Julia Reitz to charge not only the officer that used excessive force-- pepper sprayed and choked the young man-- with the appropriate charge but to also charge the officer that helped handcuff him and those officers that failed to prevent these crimes.
- We ask for the identification of the individuals that participated in the complaint process as it relates to the June 5, 2011 incident. We demand a complete timeline of the review process. When was the City Manager Steve Carter first made aware of the complaint? When did he first receive Chief Finney's ruling that the officer's actions were within the use of force guidelines? When did he first decide that Finny's report was “incomplete”? When did he first view the video?

- We urge the City Council to immediately place City Manager Steve Carter on administrative leave without pay and to launch an investigation into his role in creating and maintaining a culture of racial terrorism – racial profiling, excessive force and misconduct – that pervades the Champaign Police Department
- We demand the creation of a citizen's review board that has subpoena power, to require sworn testimony of police officers and all other parties involved in complaints about police conduct.
- We demand a local residency requirement that requires all city employees to reside within the municipal boundaries of Champaign, Illinois.
- We demand community policing rather than the “problem centered approach” currently used by the Champaign Police Department.