



Alabama Cops Arrested Man Watering His Neighbor's Plants Because He Wouldn't Give Them His Full Name

By Emma Camp

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Michael Jennings was arrested on obstruction charges, even after a neighbor who called police over "suspicious person" concerns told officers she had made a mistake.

On May 22, Michael Jennings was watering his neighbor's flowers. Minutes later, he had been arrested on obstruction charges, all because he refused to provide his full name to police officers. According to [AL.com](#), Jennings, a pastor at a church in Sylacauga, Alabama, had agreed to water his neighbor's plants while they were out of town. Sometime during the afternoon of May 22, one of Jennings's neighbors called the police, citing concerns about a suspicious person and vehicle at a nearby house.

According to recently released [body camera footage](#), Childersburg police approached the house and asked Jennings to identify himself. While Jennings told the officers his name was "Pastor Jennings," he told them that he did not have to disclose his full name, saying "I'm not gonna give you no I.D., I ain't did nothing wrong . . . I used to be a police officer."

"Come on man, don't do this to me. There's a suspicious person in the yard, and if you're not gonna identify yourself—" said an unnamed police officer, before being interrupted by Jennings, who said, "I don't have to identify myself."

As shown in the [video](#), Jennings became frustrated with the officers. "Lock me up and see what happens, I want you to," he told the officers, before walking away from them.

Jennings was then handcuffed by the officers. Shortly after he was handcuffed, one of Jennings' neighbors approached the officers and identified herself as the woman who placed the original call to the police. The woman told officers that she had misidentified Jennings, and reported him as a suspicious person. "They are friends, and they went out of town today, so he may be watering their flowers, it'd be completely normal," she said. "This is probably my fault."

"The way y'all handled this situation was totally wrong," said Jennings, still in handcuffs. "You racially profiled . . . I told ya'll I was here watering the flowers . . . I had the water hose in my hand."

According to [CBS42](#), Jennings was booked into the Talladega County Jail, though he was later released and the charges dropped. However, Jennings and his lawyers are still not satisfied. Childersburg police officers "may think all they have to do is drop the charges and this all goes away," Bethaney Embry Jones, one of Jennings' attorneys told [AL.com](#). "This was a crime, not a mistake. I would hope that the Childersburg Police Department would understand the difference."

So would Jennings' arrest hold up in court? "Every step of the way, there's room for both sides to argue that this very close case cuts their way. It's going to be a very close call in my estimation," Clark Neily, senior vice president for Legal Studies at the Cato Institute, tells *Reason*. Neily notes that while Alabama [statute](#) requires individuals to provide their name, address, and an explanation of their actions to officers when there is a reasonable suspicion of wrongdoing, Jennings arguably provided officers with all three. Further, this state law only applies to public property, which a private home is not.

"Once you were told by the neighbor that she had messed up, the only possible reason you now have to continue holding him under arrest is that he violated that law requiring people to identify themselves, right? But you have two problems," says Neily. "Problem one, this was not in public, this was on private property, so arguably the statute doesn't apply and you actually didn't have the authority. And second, he did identify himself."

While it is unclear whether the officers who arrested Jennings broke the law, there is good reason to believe that they acted outside the bounds of a state statute allowing officers to demand individuals identify themselves under some circumstances. Whether a judge would agree remains to be seen.

"Last I checked, watering roses ain't no crime," Jennings told [CBS42](#).