

# The Red & Black

## Opinion: ACCPD's transparency helps maintain support

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On Oct. 14, the Athens-Clarke County Police Department held a press conference after ACC Police Officer Lamar Glenn shot and killed Bonny Thomas while responding to a suspicious person call. This incident was the fifth time that an ACC police officer has shot a person in 2019. ACCPD Chief Cleveland Spruill explained that Thomas suggested that “she had a knife and a gun” and that the police recovered a knife at the scene.

Though the situation is tragic, ACCPD’s commitment to transparency and quick explanations have helped build community trust in the police.

Officer shootings during the past year have been much more frequent than in the past. From 2015-2018, ACCPD used lethal force only two times, according to ACCPD’s Transparency in Policing data. If ACCPD had handled the situation poorly, this could have led to severe distrust between the police and residents.

However, ACCPD has remained transparent, giving press conferences and releasing body camera footage after other shootings. For example, the department released body camera footage of an incident that occurred on Oct. 5 in which ACCPD Officer Roger Williams shot Salvador Salazar. The video shows Williams shooting Salazar only after Salazar swung a machete at him.

The transparency lends ACCPD credibility and falls in line with Spruill’s promise to build a good relationship between the police and the community. After he was hired as ACCPD Chief in early 2019, Spruill said, “I see Athens-Clarke County as an opportunity for me to use some of the tools that I have to improve the police-community relationship, to reduce crime and to build trust between us.”

This is especially important as police conduct has become a topic of national debate. Police are still widely liked by Americans. A Gallup poll found that 54% of Americans had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the police. However, they have come under scrutiny amid several racially charged incidents of poor officer conduct. Further, despite having positive feelings toward law enforcement, the public still wants greater accountability, demonstrated by its desire for police to wear body cameras. For example, a 2015 poll from YouGov and the Cato Institute found that 92% of Americans support police body cameras. Similarly, a 2016 Pew Research Center poll found that 66% of the public believes body cameras would cause police to be more

likely to act appropriately, compared to only 6% who believe it would cause police to be less likely to act appropriately.

The police play a fundamental role in keeping the community safe and Athens a good place to live and study. By committing to staying transparent, ACCPD has accomplished this goal and established a strong relationship with the county.