

Maryland sheriff clears officers in dog-killing raid, sparks lawsuit

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Summarizing his office's inquiry into a misfired marijuana raid that sent heavily armed SWAT officers into the home of innocent people, resulting in the deaths of two pet dogs and the detention of the Calvo family at gunpoint, Prince George's County, Maryland, Sheriff Michael Jackson [says](#), "in the sense that we kept these drugs from reaching our streets, this operation was a success." Sheriff Jackson's comments stand as a figurative flipped bird to a public vocally concerned about the bloody incident -- and a tossed gauntlet that Cheye Calvo has picked up and answered with a [lawsuit](#).

When county law-enforcement officers burst into the Berwyn Heights home last July, they didn't even know that it belonged to the town's mayor. Not only hadn't the raiders bothered to check Cheye Calvo's background, they hadn't even informed local police of their plans. So we have no reason to doubt Sheriff Jackson when he says, "my deputies did their job to the fullest extent of their abilities."

After all, it apparently hadn't yet occurred to these keepers of the peace that the address of Trinity Tomsic, Calvo's wife, might have been selected at random by smugglers who planned to intercept the 32-pound marijuana shipment before it reached its destination. That was the conclusion reached soon after the raid, by which time the family had been terrorized and the animals killed (one of them shot from behind, according to a veterinarian with the Maryland Department of Agriculture).

The problem isn't that the deputies didn't try "to the fullest extent of their abilities" -- it's that their abilities aren't good enough. Neither are their tactics.

But Sheriff Jackson's CYA skills are sharply honed. In fact, last week's press conference was almost a replay of a [preliminary report](#) released by Jackson just weeks after the raid. At that time, the sheriff commented, "the guys did what they were supposed to do. ... Unfortunately, we had to engage the animals, but that engagement was justified."

Justified? But why even storm into the house at all?

That's a question we could ask again, and again, and again

The Calvos could almost be said to have been lucky. After all, Minneapolis police [shot it out](#) with Vang Khang during a 2007 raid on the man's home, only finding out after the fact that they had the wrong place (officers in the incident were [decorated](#) for their "bravery."). John Adams was shot to death by police during a raid on the [wrong house](#) in Lebanon, Tennessee. And Cory Maye is [serving life in prison](#) in Mississippi after killing an officer who burst into his home after police staged yet another misfired and poorly planned drug raid that was supposed to hit the next-door apartment in his duplex.

All too many cases like this were documented in Radley Balko's book, [Overkill: The Rise of Paramilitary Police Raids in America](#). The Cato Institute maintains an [interactive map](#) of similar incidents on the Web. It's a grim record of the bloody toll taken by militarized policing, almost all of its motivated by escalating attempts to deny people the ability to use "drugs" -- intoxicants disfavored by the government.

Asking for a serious reconsideration of drug prohibition is a long-term project, although we are starting to see some progress on that front (Mexico is [decriminalizing possession of small quantities of most drugs](#)). Reining-in militarized policing may be more immediately achievable. In the wake of the raid that killed his pets, Cheye Calvo successfully [lobbied for legislation](#) to subject SWAT teams to greater scrutiny.

And he's now suing the Prince George's County sheriff's office and police department, seeking a court order forcing the county to change its policies for deploying SWAT teams.

Let's hope Calvo's operation is more of a success than the one championed by Sheriff Jackson.



After police intercepted a load of marijuana sent to Cheye Calvo's home by smugglers (who planned to intercept the dope before delivery), they staged a violent raid that resulted in the deaths of two pet dogs.

email J.D.: [civilliberties \(at\) tuccille.com](mailto:civilliberties@tuccille.com)

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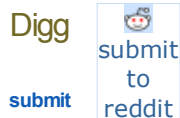
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J.D. Tuccille is an Examiner from Washington DC. You can see J.D.'s articles at: "<http://www.Examiner.com/x-536-Civil-Liberties-Examiner>"