



The Colorado Springs Gazette: Civilian review boards don't work

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We do not need a civilian review board to pass judgment on cops in Colorado Springs.

A small group of organized activists are promoting the idea, making unsupported claims of police shooting a man because he was black. Police shot De'Von Bailey, a 19-year-old armed robbery and sexual assault suspect, in the back Aug. 3. They shot him because he ran toward a park, after reportedly robbing a man at gunpoint, and refused multiple demands to put his hands in the air.

For all the officers knew, he was reaching for a gun. Though tragic and sad, it was a typical officer-involved shooting and appears well within confines of the law.

“It runs against our sense of fair play and justice to see somebody get shot in the back by a police officer,” said Denver attorney and former Colorado prosecutor Raj Chohan.

“An officer had a person who was armed and dangerous running down the street and would not stop. And in that situation, that officer is probably going to be justified in using deadly force.”

Chohan was not commenting on the death of Bailey. He had just seen [video released this week](#) of an officer in Rifle shooting Allen George, a sexual assault suspect, in the back two days after the Bailey shooting. An officer shot George, a 57-year-old white man, as he slowly jogged away with his hands visible and obviously not reaching for a gun.

The Bailey shooting, by stark contrast, involved a suspect running fast who might well have been reaching for his gun.

City Council President Richard Skorman told The Gazette in August how a citizen oversight board could serve as an “outside pair of eyes” on police conduct. He also said the city needs more research before establishing any such board.

Rigorous research should quell the idea.

“The idea of civilian review always sounds appealing because it has this connotation of democratic governance,” says Tim Lynch, director of the Cato Institute’s Project on Criminal Justice, as quoted in *Governing* magazine. “But when you look into the way it actually works, it can be ineffective as far as serious accountability for police departments.”

The Cato Institute is a libertarian policy institute with a skeptical view of authority. It would typically err on the side of civilian oversight but found review boards do not work very well.

The institute’s research of civilian boards throughout the country found them, as explained in *Governing*, “to be vulnerable to political manipulations, inadequate funding and staffing, slow-

moving investigations and a lack of authority or jurisdiction to meaningfully investigate complaints.”

Los Angeles established a review board a few years back, and the system causes more problems than it solves. Leaders of Black Lives Matter, the ACLU and other civil rights organizations don't like it

“Civilians on L.A.’s disciplinary review board have consistently been more lenient to officers than the high-ranking police personnel,” Governing explains.

Review boards have been attempted by cities for decades. If they worked well, they would have caught on. Instead, out of 18,000 law enforcement agencies, only about 200 come under the scrutiny of civilian review.

Mayor John Suthers has researched civilian review boards because “I can't stand bad cops.” He concludes civilian review does more harm than good.

“I literally get sick to my stomach thinking about bad cops,” said Suthers, a former U.S. attorney, state's attorney general, and state Department of Corrections director.

“We've gotten rid of three or four officers for excessive force since I've been mayor... We want to make sure cops are treated with due process and rule of law. In my opinion, I think cops are tougher on cops than most people think.”

Our system works. It is not broken because one of five suspects killed by officers this year had black skin.