

Hartford police shootings prompt calls for change: 'We are traumatized' HARTFORD — About 80 people gathered in front of the city police headquarters Saturday to decry the shootings — one fatal — of two mentally ill men by city officers in nine days. The crowd at the noon rally, organized by Black Lives Matter 860, included activists, two state representatives, a city councilman, at least one lawyer, a dog and a baby. It was planned after Friday's shooting by Hartford police of a man holding a knife in the middle of a public street, a shooting witnessed live by residents and captured on cellphone video. "We are (expletive) traumatized," community activist Kamora Herrington, the first of more than a dozen speakers, told the crowd. There were occasional chants, like, "No justice? No peace. No racist police." And there were signs, such as "HPD Stop Shooting my neighbors!" Some people wrote chalk messages with similar sentiments in the parking lot, facing the police station windows and cameras. They included, "Arrest Killer Cops" and "DEFUND." People of all races were present, and they sounded angry. Herrington said police "see us as less than (expletive) human. If you are here, you serve humanity. If you are here, you serve people. We're in front of a building that serves MAGA," she added, referring to President Donald Trump's slogan "Make America Great Again." "Come together so that these people, who choose to live a less-than-human life, will finally not be able to murder us," she said. No one from the Hartford Police Department came out of the building to address the crowd Saturday, and the front doors of the public building, which also houses the city's fire department headquarters, were locked. Herrington's call to action was echoed by Richard "King" Oretade, president of Black Lives Matter 860, who urged people to take action if they "see something unfolding" such as a standoff with police. "Actions speak louder than words," he said. He urged rally attendees to take video of such encounters, but also to help. His brother, Michael Oretade, said such shootings of mentally ill people hit close to home. He has a relative with mental illness. "These individuals are people, too. This could have happened to my brother," he said of the shooting. "Do not stop fighting for this community." State Rep. Jillian Gilchrest, D-West Hartford, said a police shooting probably would not happen in West Hartford, and if it did, it wouldn't happen a second time within two weeks like it did in the city. "I live 10 minutes from here, but it is an entire world away," Gilchrest said. Top of the Document She saw the video that has been circulating online, and "my heart broke listening to the screams of horror of people knowing what was about to happen and not being able to stop it," Gilchrest said. She said there is a solution. A social work law enforcement bill that integrates social work into police departments passed, but it is not funded everywhere. "We funded it in West Hartford," noted Gilchrest, who is vying along with other Democrats for John Larson's 1st District seat in Congress. She'll work to "do better by you," she told the crowd. "Know you have an ally in me and I will be fighting until we are an actual state where everybody's respected and treated the same, and we call out the injustice from one ZIP code to another." Josh Michtom, a city councilman, said there are too many police officers compared to similar cities and they all have guns. "We have twice as many police per resident as the average for cities our size. Ninety-five percent of calls to 911 don't involve a weapon, but 100 percent of the people who respond have a weapon." He said he would like to have fewer armed officers and more unarmed people helping residents. "I think we have to be real; we don't keep us safe with this building and these people," Michtom said. State Rep. Maryam Khan, D-Hartford, who said she was upset to hear about the shootings and that the United States bombed Iran, quoted rapper Tupac Shakur, saying, "It's war on the streets and the war in the Middle East." "And what are we going to do about it?" she asked. Khan, who was not happy with the way the Hartford police handled her complaint about a downtown attack on her in 2023, urged the crowd to "push back on power." Cynthia Jennings, a lawyer and longtime political figure in the city who is running in Tuesday's 7th District Democratic Town Committee primary, urged people to put down their guns and register to vote. "That is your bullet," she

said. "We have to work together. ... And if people aren't doing their job, run against them." One of the chants that rang out in the police station parking lot was started by Kelvin LoveJoy, a community organizer. A group of children stood behind him wearing reflective safety vests. "So when I say 'Heal,' you say 'Hartford,' " he said. "Heal," he said. "Hartford," the crowd chanted. "Heal." "Hartford." Top of the Document The rally ended at about 1:45 p.m. with a march down the street. "Acute mental health crisis" The man who was shot Friday was in critical condition, Hartford police Lt. Aaron Boisvert has said. During the confrontation, a stun gun was deployed unsuccessfully, and the man "ignored verbal commands" before being shot, Boisvert said. He said the man was believed to be "suicidal." Neighbors said the man, known as "Stevie," was a familiar presence around the Blue Hills neighborhood, and he was known to have mental health issues but was never a threat to others. Multiple people in the neighborhood criticized police for not de-escalating the situation before shooting the man Friday. But some defended the actions of police, arguing they were dealing with a man who was a danger to himself and others. The shooting Friday was the second Hartford police shooting involving a man in a mental health crisis holding a knife in less than 10 days. Police shot and killed Everard Walker, 53, on Capitol Avenue last week after he brandished a knife at officers, according to an Inspector General's report. On Feb. 19, Hartford police officers killed Walker after responding to a call from a family member that Walker was suffering an "acute mental health crisis," according to a report from the state Inspector General. The report noted that the Capitol Region Mental Health Center asked Hartford police officers accompany them to Walker's apartment. At Walker's apartment, an altercation began between responding officers, including officers Alexander Clifford and Geovanny Rivera, as well as Walker and his two children, the report states. "During the altercation, Walker brandished a knife. One or more officers ordered Walker to drop the knife, but he did not do so," the report said. "Walker appeared to be poised to stab Officer Rivera, who had fallen backward." Clifford then fired several shots, and after receiving medical attention at the scene, Walker was taken to Saint Francis Hospital where he was pronounced dead, according to the report. Menen Walker, one of Walker's daughters, said she and her siblings were trying to get their father to the hospital. He previously had been diagnosed with psychosis, and he had not been eating or sleeping since the October death of another daughter. Ken Krayske, who is representing the family, said the family called 211 that morning because they did not want the police to be present when they were trying to get help for Walker, whose medication had run out. Krayske said he plans to file a wrongful death lawsuit against the Hartford Police Department and the city unless officials meet with him within the next month to talk about the deadly police shooting. Rivera and Clifford are on administrative leave with pay as the deadly use of force is investigated, Boisvert said.