

# In Investigations Of Police Shootings, Utah Counties Are Divided On How To Inform The Public

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Audio: [https://cpa.ds.npr.org/kuer/audio/2020/08/200813-oici\\_transparency-em\\_web.mp3](https://cpa.ds.npr.org/kuer/audio/2020/08/200813-oici_transparency-em_web.mp3)

Utah law requires an outside, independent investigation into a police officer's use of deadly force. But there's no statewide standard for how that information reaches the public.

Utah has had 64 fatal shootings involving police officers since 2015, and 35 were in Salt Lake County, according to The Washington Post.

Salt Lake County District Attorney Sim Gill said he's pushed his office to be more open about investigating the incidents — compared to his predecessors, who he said rarely commented on the cases.

"We found that resistance initially here because there was concern this is going to lead to a lot of litigation," Gill said. "Our position was, well, if you're going to get sued, you're going to get sued, anyway."

In July, Gill presented his findings in the death of Bernardo Palacios-Carbajal at a press conference that was also broadcast on social media. The incident has received a lot of public scrutiny in the midst of ongoing protests against racial injustice and police brutality.

In an interview with KUER, Gill said he puts his findings out there to "arm" the public with information. "You don't have to agree with my conclusion," Gill said. "But you can see how I reached that conclusion and what I looked at."

But the TV cameras and Facebook live streams aren't everyone's style.

Davis County Attorney Troy Rawlings said he's investigated around 20 officer-involved critical incidents during his 13 years in office. He said all that information is available to the public if they submit an official records request, also known as GRAMA.

Rawlings said he feels a press conference politicizes the incident.

"You can't tell the whole story when you do a press conference," he said. "It's kind of a selective presentation, anyway, that is just kind of justifying what the decision is."

Similarly, Weber County Attorney Christopher Allred makes his investigation and conclusion available through a GRAMA request. Allred said, though, he would consider publishing his decision letters and body cam footage from the investigation online.

"Like Sim [Gill], my fellow county attorneys and I are all eager to provide the public with everything we can," Allred said in an email. "Transparency is very important to all of us."

Jason Stevenson, strategic communications manager for the ACLU of Utah, said it's important to make the information available — whatever form that takes. But he said the most pressing thing is that the general public is aware of police use of force.

"We are much more focused on how to prevent these situations from happening in the first place," Stevenson said.

The Institute for Innovation in Prosecution recommends that investigators consistently update the media and the family of someone killed in a police shooting throughout the investigation, as well as releasing audio and video within 10 days of the incident.

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