

Statement of

Kishon McDonald

For a Hearing on:

“The U.S. Park Police Attack on Peaceful Protesters at Lafayette Square”

Before:

House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources

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My name is Kishon McDonald, and I am a 39 year old resident of Northeast Washington DC. I've been a resident here for the past 5 years but was born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio. I honorably served my country in the US Navy on the USS Leyte Gulf as a YN-E3. I'm currently employed with United Airlines as a mechanic at the Dulles airport. I appreciate the invitation to share my experiences with you today.

On June 1, 2020, I decided to join in the peaceful protest at Lafayette Park against racial injustice. I know there was a curfew imposed for that evening so I went there as part of my usual run and planned to run back home by the curfew time of 7pm.

I arrived on 16th & I Street around 6pm, and I observed military vehicles and uniform soldiers, blocked-off streets and a huge police presence. I began recording the scene on my phone primarily because I wanted to record this moment in history and secondly for my safety because Trump had made a threat of "ominous weapons" and "vicious dogs" to be used on protesters.

I walked from 16th & I Street directly towards Lafayette Park and observed a huge group of diverse peaceful protesters chanting for George Floyd and for change. It was an overwhelming experience, and it was powerful to be a part of it. The chanting continued until around 6:25pm, when officers started approaching us as we stood on the north side of Lafayette Park along the fencing. The officers stopped for a few minutes about 10 to 15 yards away, then moved closer to us as if we were posing a threat, which we were not. They got directly in front of us to the point we could have a conversation with them. They got very close to us in a threatening kind of way. They gave no instructions. It was just a show of force.

We stood our ground. We told them we were peaceful and wanted no trouble. We were met with silence. At no time did I hear any instructions to move, and if we did hear instructions I would have moved and I'm sure the crowd would have moved because we were very peaceful during the entire time before we were attacked.

Right after 6:30pm I observed a line of police in riot Robocop gear coming in from my left. Now at this point the soldiers were communicating, but it was yelling "MOVE! MOVE!" They were not walking. They were pushing and running towards us with their shields, and people started to panic and a world of confusion ensued. I could not really understand what was going on or why they were responding in that manner seeing it was way before curfew--30 minutes before.

I observed a black male fall to the ground and protesters circled around him and demanded police stop so a medic could come assist him. The officers stopped briefly on the south side of St John's Church. We grabbed the male and started to retreat. Then the police started throwing tear gas and flash bang grenades at us for no reason. We were retreating. We didn't need any help retreating.

Using weapons on us was ridiculous and just made the situation dangerous, even though before the officers charged us or fired their weapons it had been peaceful. This is the most important block in the world, and we are in front of the most powerful governing house in the world. It's citizens who are being attacked by our own government just for asking and protesting for change. I was scared, confused and angry.

I continued recording and tried to ask officers, "Would you do this to your children?" and "Would you attack your children over protesting for change?" I was met with tear gas and a flash bangs which

exploded with shrapnel. I felt a searing hot pain on my legs and thighs. In news footage I have seen, you can observe me jumping up and down; I'm the one with the neon shorts on when the force of police pushed us up 16th Street and protesters were trampled.

I did CS gas training in boot camp. This group of demonstrators were not soldiers. This wasn't a battle stations test. But this was similar to a boot camp drill. It's unacceptable to treat protesters like that in our own city and nation.

Once I got home I reviewed all my footage and pictures. It was then that I noticed U.S. Park Police officers among the force who attacked us from the left as we stood along the fence in Lafayette Park.

I joined a lawsuit challenging the attack on me and the other demonstrators so someone will be held accountable and this moment in history isn't forgotten. I've seen footage of this kind of attack on African American protesters in the 1960s when we wanted change. The dogs and water cannons from the 60s have turned into tear gas and flash bangs today. It hurts as a black man to see that it's 2020 and we still have a government who would do this to us again over something that seems so right to protest about. The damage was done the minute the President decided to violate our First Amendment rights. How is it the KKK can hold a rally in DC and be protected, but when a black man is killed, we protest in honor of him and are attacked? How can you not perceive this as an attack on the Black Lives Matter movement?

I served this country so everyone could enjoy the freedoms granted to us under the Constitution. If anyone had the right to be there it was me. I should not have been forced to move and attacked with tear gas and flash bangs as I was peacefully protesting for change.