

Good morning and thank you for being here today. My name is Ayana Robinson. I am a medical student at the University of Michigan Medical School, a public health professional and a researcher. I am a proud alumna of Arlington High School, Everett Community College and Western Washington University. And I grew up the eldest of three daughters in and around Arlington, WA. Like my sisters, I attended school there, took dance classes, volunteered, and built community there. My husband as well as many of our closest friends grew up in our town. And my mother and two younger sisters live in there still.

My closest sister is near and dear to me. At 17, she's a budding academic, gifted in both arts and science. She is a Running Start student who attends EvCC, where she studies Cultural and Linguistic Anthropology. She's a Francophile and a musician, an artist and a creative writer. She aspires to a career in international law, because she wants to use all these skills to help others solve problems across barriers such a language, ethnicity and national origin.

But to those who know her, her talents are only the icing on the cake. What truly strikes you about this child is her kindness, warmth, compassion and grace. Her life has not been without struggle, including the sudden death of her father at the age of 9. But she possesses emotional intelligence and maturity of thought beyond her years. She has the spirit to endure and even find strength in life's greatest challenges. **But what happened to my sister on February 14th of this year is a challenge that no child should have to endure.**

Early in the morning on Valentine's Day, the police were called because my sister had collapsed in a small road in downtown

Arlington. For the past month, she had been ill. She was currently being evaluated by our family physician for her worsening health. That particular evening, she and her boyfriend had decided to break up, for reasons common to any teenage romance.

Distraught, my sister had stopped to debrief with a mutual friend on the way home. She stopped just three blocks from my mother's house in town. As she began to describe her upset about the breakup, she started having an anxiety attack. This combined with her physical illness caused her to collapse in the road.

She was ill and she was sad. She wasn't a threat to anyone. She was simply collapsed in tears, an event not uncommon in adolescence. The police were called by witnesses who saw a young girl in the road. Some even voiced concern for her well-being and asked the police help her. But when the police arrived, help was not what she received.

Upon arrival, the police quickly surrounded her. They yelled at her to get up and out of the street. She was surprised to see them and wanted to do as they said. Until that night, my sister would have told anyone that she trusted the police. She knows several of our local officers by name and they know her. It is a small community, and her past interactions with them had always been civil even kind. She trusted them to take care of her.

When the police told her to get out of the street, she staggered up and asked if she could go home, or go to her car. They told her to go to her car so she went. She sat down instead and locked the doors, trying to start the breathing exercises she knows she needs to get through an anxiety attack. But she noticed that her now ex-boyfriend's pocket knife was lying closed on the seat. She decided to put it away in case the police were concerned she had a

weapon. But then, the police surrounded her vehicle. They started to scream at her to step out of the vehicle. She was scared. She was having an anxiety attack. When she didn't immediately comply, the officers escalated the situation.

While many facts of her case will be disputed, what is not disputed is this. An officer broke the passenger side window of my sister's car and pulled her through the broken glass. They shouted at her to drop the closed pocket knife. Then, an officer tazed her, and while the taser sent waves of electricity through her body, she was shot multiple times including in the chest and abdomen.

She was not holding a knife at the time of the shooting. The pocket knife was recovered at the scene far from where she'd be shot. After being pulled from her car and screamed at, she was terrified. Apologizing, she threw the knife away. But the police continued to shout at her to drop her weapon. She screamed that she had, she had dropped the knife. But they attacked anyway.

PAUSE

As we care for my sister, I have watched and listened as various statements by police have been circulated in the media. In the first sensitive days after the attack, it was leaked that the girl had been involved in an "altercation" with her boyfriend, an innuendo that suggested that some kind of violent dispute was the reason that the police were there. This is a baseless accusation that is not supported by eyewitness evidence. It was also leaked that "a knife was recovered at the scene". It is very concerning to me and mine that it was only after a few more days had passed without video

evidence of the shooting that the police changed their story to openly accuse my sister of advanced on them with a knife. This again is an assertion that is in direct contradiction with all eyewitness testimony.

These slanderous statements by the police AND their circulation as bona fide fact by some news sources constitute nothing less than a deliberate character assassination intended to diminish public opinion of my sister's character and to paint her as a character more deserving of lethal force. Attempts to criminalize her, an outstanding girl with no criminal record, only seek to justify the use violence against her.

Not only is this narrative artificial, it is immoral. Because the reason that we are here today, the reason I am here in her stead is that she is a CHILD. A child who was crying, simply expressing emotion in public. A child who was no threat to anyone. If the officers perceived that she was a threat, this threat was not perceived by eyewitnesses. These officers of the law, who are charged by our community and their sacred oaths to protect her... as a child, as a citizen of this country and a member of her community... were instead an instrument of her injury, and nearly her death.

This poisonous narrative includes the suggestion that she is somehow mentally unstable or that she was suicidal at the time of the incident. As she has been receiving excellent physical and mental healthcare all her life, this is easily disproved. And if it true that the police violently pulled her through her window because they hoped to protect her from herself, than I am truly sorry to

see that their best intentions were deeply unsuccessful. We should be asking questions of ourselves and our community's policing practices if an honest attempt by our officers of the law to prevent self-harm culminated in the near death of a child.

What we expect is what any family should expect in the United States of America. We expect an open and transparent investigation into what happened that night. We expect a justice system that seeks to determine the facts and decide fairly based on the specifics of her case. We expect that her treatment under the law will be free of bias or coercion. And we expect the community that we have contributed to and been a part of for decades to support my dear sister through a terrible and unfortunate accident.

Often the drama of a person tragedy is misused by parties on all sides seeking to legitimize their cause or push a larger political agenda. As her sister, we beg you, our community, to be mindful of appropriating my sister's story for posturing or grandstanding. Please, don't let your commitment to protect Blue Lives or Black Lives cloud your reason and judgement of her specific situation. She is not about hating or supporting the police. Don't let the tide of this political moment overshadow the issue before us: that this child was unnecessarily injured and nearly killed by those sworn to protect her. Supporting her, caring for her, is not a sign of disrespect of the police. It is an acknowledgement of hers and the officers humanity, that we all make errors of judgement. As a free and just society, it is our responsibility to seek fair proceedings and support the well-being of this young lady. And to seek to

make changes to any system which inadequately prevents such unfortunate events like this from happening in our community.

We are hopeful that SMART Task Force, the Arlington Police Department and Prosecutor Roe will work collaboratively with us to produce an independent and unbiased investigation of the facts of her case. We are hopeful that the justice system will seek to uphold justice and the law above petty politicking. And we are hopeful that truth is made clear. Thank you to those journalists who hold themselves accountable to the thorough vetting of facts and responsible use of their media platform to prevent biased reporting. There is a big difference between saying, the sky was dark versus police claim that the sky was dark.

Thank you to the many people, in Arlington and beyond, who have reached out in ways big and small to show your love and support. It is a difficult thing to lose your health, sense of safety and your home in one fell swoop. As her family, we are united in our support of our child, but we know we cannot do it alone. We have created a website and GoFundMe page to keep our community informed and raise funds for her recovery. To all those who've reached out, there are not words of gratitude I could share that would cover a speck of what we feel.

Please keep her in your prayers and your heart. Tell her story. Spread the word. www.breakingthroughthebullets.com Peace, love and safety from our family to yours.

