

NEWS

# Baton Rouge police officers cleared in 2016 killing of Alton Sterling

By Chris Perez

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Alton Sterling, who was shot dead by police in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in an undated photo.

Reuters

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Prosecutors in Louisiana have decided not to charge the white Baton Rouge cops involved in [the fatal 2016 shooting of Alton Sterling](#), a black man whose death sparked widespread protests.

State Attorney General Jeff Landry made the announcement Tuesday during a press conference.

“This decision was not taken lightly,” he said after revealing that no criminal charges would be brought against the officers.

“We came to this conclusion after countless hours of reviewing the evidence.”

The announcement comes nearly two years after Sterling was shot and killed outside a convenience store in the Louisiana capital.

Hundreds of protesters, enraged by cell phone footage of the shooting, were arrested in the ensuing days.

It was also captured on body camera [and convenience store surveillance](#).

Justice Department officials [had previously decided against bringing federal charges](#) against officers Blane Salamoni and Howie Lake, claiming there was “insufficient” evidence.

Landry launched a state probe following the DOJ’s ruling in May 2017 and later took over the investigation after the prosecutor for East Baton Rouge recused himself for a prior relationship he had with Salamoni’s parents.

The state prosecutor told reporters Tuesday that federal investigators ultimately determined that the officers’ actions were “well-founded and reasonable” due to the circumstances.

The cops had been responding to a report of a man with a gun when they came across Sterling on July 5, 2016. Landry said they attempted to make a “lawful arrest,” but the 37-year-old resisted and a “struggle” ensued on the ground.

Lake tried “tazing” Sterling at least two times — “with little or no effect,” according to Landry.

Video footage shows Salamoni and Lake struggling to subdue him, while screaming that “he’s got a gun.”

“He’s going for the gun!” Salamoni can be heard saying loudly before firing three rounds into Sterling’s chest.

A loaded .38 caliber handgun was later found in his right front pocket.

“These are the facts,” Landry said. “The seminal question presented is whether Officers Howie Lake and Blane Salamoni can be held criminally responsible for the death of Alton Sterling under applicable laws of the State of Louisiana. Our job was not to determine whether BRPD policy was followed or if certain tactics or language were more appropriate than others.”

Landry added, “As with every criminal case — we must analyze the evidence, the law, and the facts and draw conclusions, but we are always mindful of the human element. I know the Sterling family is hurting. I know they may not agree with this decision. I am ever-mindful that a mother who prematurely loses a son, or a child who loses a father, experiences a pain that no one should have to endure. I am asking that everyone considers the family in the coming days and spend time and energy in lifting them up, rather than creating further division.”

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