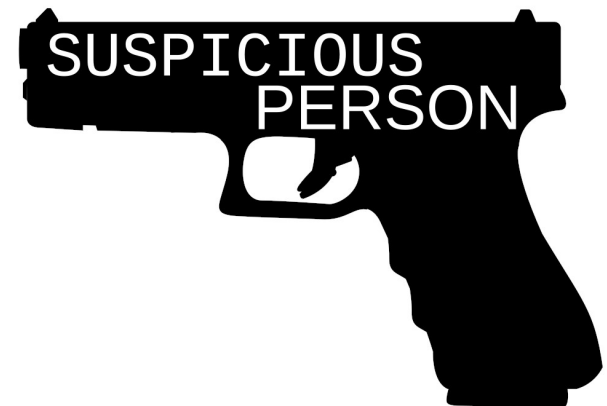


WELFARE CHECK

# WHY PEOPLE IN ASHEVILLE CALL POLICE





For data on police calls in Asheville, see *Asheville Police calls: Roadmap for Defunding?* by Sally Kestin and John Maines on AVL Watchdog:  
<https://avlwatchdog.org/asheville-police-calls-roadmap-for-defunding/>



## KILLER COPS AND COP CALLERS

In the leaked body camera footage that showed Asheville cop Chris Hickman assaulting Johnnie Rush in 2017, Hickman claims that the reason they were patrolling that street was because they've received complaints from Smile Starters, a pediatric dentist office, about people trespassing in their parking lot.

So many cases of police brutalizing and/or killing people happen after someone makes a relatively minor complaint or request. Atatiana Jefferson, for example, was killed by a cop after a neighbor called to request a they perform a welfare check because they had noticed the front door of the house was open. The cop went into the back yard and shot her through the window.<sup>1</sup>

Often these are the result of complaints from businesses. In Fullerton, California police received a call from Slidebar Rock-N-Roll Kitchen about vandalism which resulted in cops beating Kelly Thomas, a houseless man diagnosed with schizophrenia, to death.<sup>2</sup>

There are endless examples of frivolous police calls resulting in tragedy. The ensuing police brutality correctly gets most of the attention such stories, but what would have happened if people just didn't call the police?

## COPS AND CRIME

Growing up I learned that police are trouble and you should try take care of problems yourself instead of getting authorities involved. As a kid I imagined that people only called cops when they were terrified for their lives—like if they were a horror movie character hiding in the closet from a serial killer that's inside their house (but in that case the phone probably isn't working anyway). The first time I heard of someone calling the

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1 <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/fort-worth-police-officer-who-fatally-shot-atatiana-jefferson-indicted-n1105916>

2 <https://www.ocregister.com/2020/05/19/fullerton-releases-2400-pages-of-reports-in-the-police-beating-death-of-kelly-thomas/>

police because they saw someone walking down the sidewalk and they thought the person was on drugs, I was very confused.

I think the horror movie scenario is still where a lot of peoples' brains go when they hear about the concept of abolishing the police. Despite years of violent crime rates dropping<sup>3</sup>, polls show that many Americans believe it's actually increased<sup>4</sup>. What about the murderers? What about the rapists?

The truth is that the police spend very little of their time actually dealing with crime, and what they do gets investigated after the fact rather than stopped. 40% of murders go unsolved<sup>5</sup> and less than 1% of rapists get convicted<sup>6</sup>. There is also evidence suggesting that police work itself actually contributes to crime. A case demonstrating this is when the NYPD stopped doing patrols in response to protests regarding the murder of Eric Garner, crime actually went down.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, police violence in 2020 is on track to be the same as 2019<sup>8</sup> despite a drastic decrease in crime due to the pandemic.<sup>9</sup>

We know that the horror movie examples aren't really what police are doing and there's plenty of data to show this, so why is that where peoples' brains go? Data is good, but anecdotes are powerful. There's so much police propaganda in shows and in the news. Despite the data, the stories we always hear are the spectacular ones involving unusual violence. I wanted a better picture of what people in our town are actually calling the police about, hence this piece.

## LISTENING TO THE RADIO

To get some insight into what Ashevilleans are calling the police about, I got a radio and started scanning frequencies used by

- 3 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/17/facts-about-crime-in-the-u-s/>
- 4 <https://news.gallup.com/poll/186308/americans-say-crime-rising.aspx>
- 5 <https://www.vox.com/2018/9/24/17896034/murder-crime-clearance-fbi-report>
- 6 <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system>
- 7 <https://www.latimes.com/science/sciencenow/la-sci-sn-proactive-policing-crime-20170925-story.html>
- 8 <https://killedbypolice.net/>
- 9 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/marleycoyne/2020/04/11/crime-rates-across-us-drop-amid-the-coronavirus-pandemic/#52ab57ba311e>



Caller can hear a male subject in car yelling at female.

**17:38:** Business Alarm, 27 Mulvaney St.

**18:06:** Person w/gun, Walmart 60 airport

Referencing subject who pulled a gun on another in argument over wearing mask.

**18:08:** BOLO, 583 Brevard Rd

SUV, handicap tag, heading towards rainbow church. Driving at high rate of speed. Almost ran another vehicle off the road.

**19:22:** Person down, Hendersonville Rd.

Man laying in roadway near Blake drive.

**19:47:** Intoxicated person flying a sign at Shell Station on Merrimon.

**20:15:** Complaint about people arguing in a hallway

**20:18:** Call from one of the participants of above argument, which is about possible stolen money.

**20:28:** Call about cars parked on Burton St.

APD. The things I heard were more ridiculous than I had ever imagined.

The vast majority of things I heard were suspicious persons reports or requests for welfare checks. A lot of businesses calling the police to run houseless people off and a lot of busybodies reporting stupid things to the police like someone not wearing a seatbelt.

My favorite call so far was when Manicomio's Pizza called police to report skateboarders outside. The dispatcher radioed a cop who responded in a very exasperated voice asking if there was any reason the complainant needed the police to come. The dispatcher called Manicomio's back and then radioed back that they want the police to run them off. There was also an amusing report of a group of people on College Street mooning drivers.

After listening for a few days, I felt that people need to hear these complaints. It's true that police are a problem—the institution needs to be abolished. It's also true that there is a malicious segment of the population that actively seeks to mobilize police violence against people they don't want around (eg some of the people who showed up to a West Asheville police meeting last year to demand that police harass and search houseless people and claimed that their children shouldn't have to see houseless people). However, there's definitely a segment of the population that just calls the police by default and doesn't know what to do otherwise.

I'd like to make an appeal to those people: **Please don't call the police.** At least take a step back and think about what you're doing before you call the police. Is this something you can handle on your own? Is it something that needs to be handled at all? Is it any of your business? Is anyone actually being harmed in the situation? Is your desire to call the police being motivated by prejudice? If you get someone hurt or killed by calling the cops, are you ready to take responsibility for that? ***Is a cop—someone who is trained to deal with situations using violence—actually helpful in the situation?***

**To the business owners:** If I ever hear about you calling the police to run off houseless people or intervene in other frivolous situations, I will never patronize your business and I hope the community holds you accountable for any harm your irresponsible behavior causes.

Couple came to hotel front desk, asked for police to be called. They were arguing and returned to their room.

**16:13:** Welfare check, Ingles Leicester Hwy

White male middle age short in height, long sleeve blue shirt approached an employee said he was feeling suicidal. He's in the deli now. Doesn't appear to have any weapons.

**16:17:** Welfare check, Chuckie Cheese River Hill Road

There's a baby stroller with a blanked over it. No adults around.

**16:24:** Welfare check, Intersection of Brevard Road and Richfield Blvd

White male green cap t-shirt jeans laying on the sidewalk.

**16:26:** Vandalism, 425 Patton Avenue

Person requests to meet with police regarding vandalism at Biltmore at corner of Patton and Haywood.

**16:45:** 155 Broadway St

Truck ran into bridge, load came off truck and hit complainant's vehicle.

**16:50:** Overdose, Actwoods Rd(?)

28 year old male, unconscious, breathing. Heroin or Fentanyl. No Narcan is available.

**17:07:** Domestic disturbance, magistrates office

Person in the office says there's a white male who assaulted her and will not leave her vehicle.

**17:09:** Welfare check, Kimberly Ave, Beaver Dam Road

Elderly male, wearing a white top, was seen talking oddly.

**17:16:** Welfare check

Female in black sedan has a child who is not wearing a seatbelt. "Ongoing issue"?

**17:20:** BOLO (Be On Lookout), Biltmore Ave, Eagle Street  
BMW driving at high rate of speed.

**17:25:** Possible civil disturbance



Black man with a cane. Harassing customers, urinating on side of building. (Seemingly called by passerby).

**13:57:** Suspicion person, welfare check, I-240

Black man with headphones. Walking westbound in eastbound lane.

**14:04:** Caretake Green Hill Cemetery requested to meet with police regarding threats made by a houseless person when they were forced to leave a camp.

**14:14:** Shoplifting at Walmart, 60 Airport Rd.

Female subject in the office, no ID.

**14:23:** Welfare check requested on person who had a baby recently and has not been seen. (Cop later showed up at residence and said they don't believe the person lives there.)

**14:40:** Civil disturbance, Haywood road.

Female subject is laying down on bus, refusing to get off.

**15:02:** Vandalism in progress, 190 Biltmore Ave. (Citgo)

Two subjects, white male and female, throwing rocks at business. (Cop showed up and reported no property damage, nobody throwing rocks, but saw a white female in a white shirt nearby bleeding.)

**15:05:** I-40 wreckless driver

**15:13:** Suspicious persons Tunnel Rd

Subjects drinking near mailbox, have bags hanging in the trees.

**15:15:** Motor vehicle accident. White mini-cooper and white van in parking lot.

**15:18:** Wreckless driver, 776 Biltmore Ave

Black Toyota Land Cruiser. Vehicle seen hitting other vehicles.

**15:39:** Welfare check, Walmart parking lot.

Black male wearing yellow jersey, in silving Honda Civic. Having medical issue.

**16:10:** Domestic disturbance, 1514 Tunnel Room

## INSTEAD OF CALLING THE COPS

I decided to listen to the radio one day and transcribe everything I heard. What follows is a log of everything I heard on Monday, June 29<sup>th</sup>. I've removed anything information that looks like it could identify individuals or home addresses (but have not removed references to businesses). I encourage you to read through it and see what people call the police about. Think about what could be done in each situation instead of calling the cops.

Before reading the logs, check out this text lifted from "*12 Things to do Instead of Calling the Cops*" a zine produced by the May Day Collective and Solidarity & Defense:

*Calling the police often escalates situations, puts people at risk, and leads to violence. Anytime you seek help from the police, you're inviting them into your community and putting people who may already be vulnerable into dangerous situations. Sometimes people feel that calling the police is the only way to deal with problems. But we can build trusted networks of mutual aid that allow us to better handle conflicts ourselves and move toward forms of transformative justice, while keeping police away from our neighborhoods.*

- 1. Don't feel obligated to defend property—especially corporate "private" property. Before confronting someone or contacting the police, ask yourself if anyone is being hurt or endangered by property "theft" or damage. If the answer is "no," then let it be.*
- 2. If something of yours is stolen and you need to file a report for insurance or other purposes, consider going to the police station instead of bringing cops into your community. You may inadvertently be putting someone in your neighborhood at risk.*
- 3. If you observe someone exhibiting behavior that seems "odd" to you, don't assume that they are publicly intoxicated. A traumatic brain injury or a similar medical episode may be occurring. Ask if they are OK, if they have a medical condition, and if they need assistance.*
- 4. If you see someone pulled over with car trouble, stop and ask if they need help or if you can call a tow truck for them. If the police are introduced to such a situation, they may give punitive and unnecessary tickets to people with car issues, target those without papers, or worse.*

5. *Keep a contact list of community resources like suicide hotlines. When police are contacted to “manage” such situations, people with mental illness are sixteen times more likely to be killed by cops than those without mental health challenges.*
6. *Check your impulse to call the police on someone you believe looks or is acting “suspicious.” Is their race, gender, ethnicity, class, or housing situation influencing your choice? Such calls can be death sentences for many people.*
7. *Encourage teachers, coworkers, and organizers to avoid inviting police into classrooms, workplaces, and public spaces. Instead, create for a culture of taking care of each other and not unwittingly putting people in harm’s way. If you’re part of a group that’s holding a rally or demonstration, don’t get a permit or otherwise cooperate with the police.*
8. *If your neighbor is having a party and the noise is bothering you, go over and talk to them. Getting to know your neighbors with community events like monthly block parties is a good way to make asking them to quiet down a little less uncomfortable, or to find another neighbor who is willing to do so.*
9. *If you see someone peeing in public, just look away! Remember, for example, that many houseless people do not have reliable access to bathrooms.*
10. *Hold and attend deescalation, conflict resolution, first-aid, volunteer medic, and self-defense workshops in your neighborhood, school, workplace, or community organization.*
11. *Street art is beautiful! Don’t report graffiti and other street artists. If you see work that includes fascist or hate speech, paint over it yourself or with friends.*
12. *Remember that police can escalate domestic violence situations. You can support friends and neighbors who are being victimized by abusers by offering them a place to stay, a ride to a safe location, or to watch their children. Utilize community resources like safe houses and hotlines.*

## **RADIO LOGS FROM MONDAY, JUNE 29**

**11:20:** Suspicious Individual, Sweet Biscuit Inn, Kenilworth

Complainant reports suspicious individual. 6ft white male w/shaggy brown hair in pajama pants wandering around. Reports mental health issues. Complainant requests a call or meeting from officer after response.

**11:23:** Trespassing, Country Inn and Suits, West Gate

White male. Curly brown hair. Female with him. They're in a car. Complainant requests meeting after response.

**11:25:** Person down, Montford Ave.

White female, purple hoodie, grey shorts. Threw shelf onto a car and is remaining on the ground.

**11:27:** Civil disturbance, Altamont Apartments

Person in lobby there to pick up belongings, being refused entry into the apartments.

**13:09:** Simple assault, B&B Pharmacy

Complainant advised they were assaulted by their daughter, (who is a .5? not sure what was said here). They've left the area.

**13:24:** Suspicious person in front of 1 Biltmore (Pisana?)

Male, (Details missed. Something about person being recognized from incident at Mast General store.) Blonde hair black shirt black jeans. Subject was no longer present when police arrived.

**13:26:** Civil Disturbance, Target

White males in Ford F1-50 driving through parking lot and screaming at, threatening to run over people.

**13:32:** Civil disturbance, Goodwill Patton Ave

Hispanic male with a machete threatening people. He is now with two other people, one with a black hat, one with a red hat.

**13:39:** Vehicle stopped in roadway, Merrimon Avenue.

**13:52:** Suspicious person at post office, Coxe Avenue