

Perlow does say Payne should not have been taken to jail that night by the EPD officers.

“He should have been transported to the hospital given his condition,” Perlow tells *EW*.

EW asked Perlow if she had shared her opinion with Eugene Police. “I don’t make policy or enforce policy for any of the law enforcement agencies in Lane County,” she said.

Skinner declined to answer *EW*’s questions about the death of Landon Payne or the actions of his officers in arresting Payne.

Payne’s death came two months before police in Minneapolis killed George Floyd in May 2020 and set off nationwide protests over racial injustice and police brutality.

Landon Payne was white, but the scrutiny of deaths in police custody has also focused on the treatment of the mentally ill and the need for greater accountability when suspects die in police custody.

Floyd’s death happened in public view. Minneapolis officer Derek Chauvin pressed his knee against Floyd’s neck as Floyd lay face down in the street, with witnesses looking on and iPhone video recording the scene. The visibility has forced police to be held accountable, including criminal charges against officers and a murder conviction for Chauvin.

Meanwhile, Payne’s death has been whispered about among Lane County law-enforcement officials, but the case has not been revealed publicly until now.

EPD stamped reports about Payne’s death “confidential.” A Marion County judge handling Payne’s civil child-support case followed EPD’s direction and sealed the reports in a court file.

EW and the Catalyst Journalism Project have pieced together this story using documents and video obtained under Oregon public records law. The documents include police reports, Payne’s autopsy report and video of up to eight Lane County deputies restraining Payne at the county jail. The video also shows a frantic 19-minute effort to revive him.

The *EW*/Catalyst investigation also found that the Eugene police gave Payne’s widow, Angie, false information about what happened to her husband.

The night Payne was arrested, an EPD officer told Angie Payne only that her husband had collapsed while being booked into the jail. The officer and other EPD officials never told her that deputies intentionally took Payne to the ground or that Payne stopped breathing while being restrained.

Records show that EPD officers were aware they had given Angie Payne incomplete information, but they never corrected the record. Angie Payne says she learned the details only after *EW* shared with her its findings about Payne’s death.

“I feel lied to,” Angie Payne says. “I was missing puzzle pieces from what happened that night.”

“At the same time,” she adds, “intuitively, I felt like there’s something missing that I don’t know.”

A ROLLING STONE

Landon Jay Payne spent his childhood following his parents to Georgia, New York, Texas and Ontario, Canada, before returning to Oregon, where he’d been born in 1983. His parents worked in the winery business, but his father struggled with substance abuse. Payne struggled in school, too fidgety to focus in class.

He started drinking and smoking weed in high school, and years of addiction followed along with long stretches of sobriety and battles with depression. After taking classes at Chemeketa Community College, he worked as a landscaper, rarely holding jobs for long. He had two children and struggled to make child-support payments. “Everything he tried, the wheels fell off,” his sister, Monica Payne, tells *EW*. “And it’s not that he didn’t try, I think he just didn’t fit the mold.”

Payne loved few things more than electronic music — performing club and occasional festival shows professionally in Oregon until his early 30s. His shyness deterred him from committing to music as a career, but he carried it on as a hobby. Years later, his wife would hear him in his room editing music on a computer. “It was like him in his natural habitat,” she says.

But early on, Payne got into trouble with the law. In 2002, when he was 19, police in Salem arrested Payne

for dealing marijuana. He received a five-year probation sentence, but was later sentenced to six months in the Marion County Jail for violating probation after he was charged in 2007 with selling mushrooms and LSD, and as a felon in possession of a firearm. (Police found an antique handgun in his home, according to his sister.) Payne served two years of a three and half year sentence before being released from Powder River Correctional Facility in Baker City.

“I made some very negative choices in my life. I’m not going down that direction any longer,” Payne told the judge at a hearing in 2009. “It was obviously necessary for this to occur in my life for me to make the changes that were necessary, because the route that I was going was not beneficial to anyone.”

Landon and Angie Payne married in 2013 and lived with her two children in north Eugene. He worked occasionally as a landscaper and in computer repair but still struggled to make his child-support payments — the state of Oregon filed two civil cases against him to collect. In 2014 the Eugene police arrested Payne for driving under the influence, driving while using a cell phone and for having an open container, according to Eugene Municipal Court records. The case was dismissed in 2016 after he completed a diversion program.

Angie Payne said her husband still fought off depression and a desire to isolate himself.

On the night of Jan. 21, 2017, Angie Payne came home



to find Landon paranoid and delusional. He said he had smoked meth and believed people were out to get him. He either fell or jumped from a second floor window and ran off. Angie called police, told them Payne was having “some sort of mental crisis,” and asked for help in finding him.

Just more than an hour later, shortly before 12:30 am, officers found Payne wandering in the median of Delta Highway. Payne was disoriented and wearing dark clothes. Officers feared Payne might step into traffic, so they detained him on a non-criminal mental hold and took him to PeaceHealth’s University District Hospital. It’s not known what treatment Payne received while he was there.

Angie Payne says her husband stayed clean after that incident. But he had something hanging over his head — an unresolved contempt case against him for unpaid child-support.

Also in 2017, Payne had failed to show for a court hearing over the debt. A Marion County judge found him in contempt of court and issued a warrant for his arrest.

The warrant hung over him as he tried again to work. In 2019 Payne took a job as a welder and as a sawyer — sawing wood — at Carry-On Trailers in Coburg until he slashed his right hand on the job. Angie Payne said Landon remained optimistic and always talked about finding a way to become a better person.

“Angie,” Payne told her at the start of 2020, “this will be my year.”

CALLING FOR HELP

Landon Payne died after a series of turning points and decisions made by law enforcement. But the events of March 27, 2020, began after Payne had smoked meth with a friend. He had left his house the day before. When he returned on the 27th, Payne admitted to Angie that he’d smoked meth. Angie said he got on his knees. “This was the stupidest thing I could’ve done,” he told Angie, telling her he feared he would die. “I have so much to do still here.”

Payne took a long walk, hoping to steady himself. But he returned and his anxiety turned into panic. He told Angie he feared that family members were trying to kill him. “Help, help,” he murmured, but soon he was screaming.

At around 9:30 pm, Angie Payne says, Landon went outside, hoping more fresh air would help. It’s then, she recalled, that Landon “started freaking out.”

“He’s just panicking, fearful for his life,” she recalled.

Angie could see neighbors watching and feared they would call the police. So she called the police to explain what was happening. She was right; a neighbor had called 911 minutes earlier and two more also reported Landon to the police. An EPD dispatcher relayed one of the calls, “Male across the street yelling that someone is trying to murder him.”

THE POLICE ARRIVE, AND THINGS GET WORSE

The EPD officers dispatched to the Payne house heard two key pieces of information over their radios. First, they were told that EPD had previously taken Payne for mental hold, signaling the police knew Payne had a history of mental-health issues. Second, they learned about the Marion County warrant issued for Payne three years earlier over unpaid child support.

The first EPD officer to arrive was Jairo Solorio, whose decisions and actions that night were key in the events that followed. Solorio had four years’ experience as an officer in Billings, Montana, before joining the Eugene police nine months before Payne’s arrest.

EPD requires its officers to take a 40-hour crisis intervention team training (CIT) to prepare them for dealing with people experiencing a mental-health crisis. According to EPD policies, “Officers are expected to use their CIT training when responding to incidents involving persons in crisis due to a known or perceived mental illness.”

Solorio had not received the mandatory training, according to records with the state Department of Public Safety Standards and Training. Neither had another who showed up at Payne’s house, Officer Andrew Roberts. A third officer who also arrived, Jacob Thomas, an EPD officer since 2013, was the only officer present who had even partly completed the mandatory training, state records show.

Solorio and Thomas spoke to Landon and Angie Payne, who told the officers Landon had returned home acting erratic and he had had a similar incident several years ago.

Angie Payne remembers that Solorio and Thomas talked calmly to Landon, asking him if he was a danger to himself or others. Landon said, “No.”

In his report, Thomas later described Landon as “animated in his movements and seemed very paranoid, which was consistent with methamphetamine use.” Solorio later wrote in his report that Landon Payne was “aggressive with our interaction” and that he was “sweating and very confrontational.” Solorio quoted Payne as saying, “If I remain here, I’m going to be killed.”

Angie Payne’s memories of what happened differ in important ways to what Solorio and Thomas later reported. “[Landon] started to sober up and was making some good suggestions and reasoning with the officers,” she told *EW*.

She later gave a similar account to an EPD investigator soon after Landon’s death. “For a bit, he almost like, was clear headed,” Angie Payne told the investigator. “He was getting really delusional. And, when they came, he started to kind of, you know, reason with them.”

There’s one way to determine precisely what happened on the Paynes’ porch that night — at least one of the officers was wearing a body camera. Under Oregon public records law, *EW* has requested a copy of the body camera video. EPD officials have refused to release it. *EW* is appealing the denial, arguing the public interest outweighs the EPD’s efforts to keep the video secret.