



## JUSTICE FOR DR. YAN LI

On March 3, 2022, Dr. Yan Li, a San Diego resident, and a Yale-educated Ph.D., was fatally shot by San Diego police and sheriff's deputies at her residence. Her life was ended abruptly and violently by a hail of bullets. She was 47.

The news sent shockwaves through our communities - yet another killing involved police shootings. We are deeply saddened and once again, we ask the question: why did this happen? Did Dr. Li have to die?

Like many immigrants in the San Diego Asian community, Dr. Li came to the United States to pursue advanced education and the American dream. After earning her doctorate from Yale, she went on to have a distinguished career as a biostatistician in both academic institutions and the pharmaceutical industry. Dr. Sten Vermund, the Dean of Yale's School of Public Health, said in an interview that Dr. Li will be "remembered by her colleagues as a very pleasant and hardworking individual, quite a brilliant mind".

A few years ago, Dr. Li made the decision to call San Diego home. Sadly, this city prematurely became her final resting place.

Late last year, an eviction action against her started in the San Diego superior court. On March 3, a San Diego County sheriff's deputy went to Dr. Li's residence to serve the notice to evict. **It is important to know that California law, which is posted on San Diego Superior Court's website, requires a two-step eviction process: (1) deliver the eviction notice, and (2) no less than five days later, perform a physical eviction if necessary.**

Dr. Li died on March 3, 2022, the date that the sheriff was instructed to conduct the first step: Delivering the notice to evict.

When Dr. Li opened her door, she had a knife in her hand. We cannot speculate as to why she was holding a knife in her hand. She immediately asked the deputy to show his badge, which the deputy not only ignored but drew his gun and threatened to shoot. In an apparent state of emotional distress and confusion, Dr. Li yelled at the deputy, 'how do I know you are not an intruder!', and, 'call the police!'.

To many people, especially immigrants, it is common to not recognize sheriff's deputies as law enforcement officers because they wear unfamiliar uniforms. In any case, it is legitimate for anyone in that situation to ask law enforcement officers to identify themselves and show the badge.

What followed that short exchange is difficult to comprehend. In the heavily edited 10-minute video released by the Sheriff's Department, Dr. Li threw out the notice and then shut the door and retreated to her own room. At this point, the deputy's task was completed, as the notice had been served. The proper procedure would be to wait until the final eviction date, at which time if Dr. Li had not moved off the premises, the deputy would be authorized to forcibly remove her.



But instead of leaving, the deputy called for backup. Additional officers and a K-9 unit arrived. Without a warrant, the police officers and sheriff's deputies entered Dr. Li's residence. When Dr. Li refused to come out of her bedroom, and started yelling 'this is invasion', bean bags were fired at her. When Dr. Li finally was forced to come out, she chased the officers with a knife in her hand and stabbed one of the officers in his chest that caused a minor injury. Right then, the two deputies and one police officer fired multiple shots, and instantly killed her.

Dr. Li was dead less than an hour after the deputy's first arrival. We are heartbroken, not only because a precious life was lost and a brilliant mind is gone, but also because we believe that this tragedy could have been averted. Dr. Li did not have to die. There are more questions than answers from the 10-minute edited video released by the Sheriff's Department. Dr. Yan Li deserved answers, her family deserves answers, and we deserve answers:

- Why did the sheriff's deputy refuse to show his badge when it was requested by Dr. Li? Did he follow his training and protocol?
- After the notice was served and Dr. Li retreated into her own room, why did the deputy not leave the premises and wait for the final eviction as directed by California law?
- Why did the deputy escalate the situation after Dr. Li had already closed the door and the situation appeared to have returned to normal?
- Why was a K-9 Unit at the scene but not a mental health professional? According to San Diego Sheriff's website, a K-9 unit is called to assist with "finding a suspect or assisting during a SWAT standoff; to sniff out hidden drugs and items of evidence in a crime that could generate leads; and to search a designated area fast and more thoroughly." What is the justification for invoking a K-9 Unit in this case?
- Dr. Li was shot dead less than an hour after her first encounter with a law enforcement officer. Approximately one month earlier, when a police SWAT team responded to a man shooting inside his Rancho Bernardo home, the standoff lasted more than six hours before the suspect was taken into custody, ALIVE. What is the proper procedure for the police and the sheriff's department when dealing with a mental health crisis?
- Under what pretense did police and deputies decide to enter Dr. Li's residence without a warrant when Dr. Li appeared to pose no imminent danger to the public?
- Why did police and deputies shoot her with bean bags when she was hiding in her own bedroom and refused to come out?
- Why did the police and deputies force their way into Dr. Li's residence and forced a confrontation which led to her death before a mental health expert from the county's PERT team (Psychiatric Emergency Response Team) arrived on the scene?



## Alliance of Chinese Americans San Diego



- The encounter lasted about 45 minutes, yet the edited video released by SDPD is about 10 minutes, what happened in those missing minutes? The community respectfully requests the release of the full, unedited video.
- California's emergency rental assistance program is set to expire on March 31. Landlords will be able to start filing eviction notices on April 1 for tenants behind on rent due to hardship from the COVID-19 pandemic. Unless a city or county has additional protections in place, pending evictions notices could be staggering. What proper training and procedures have been implemented by the Sheriff department to execute in the eviction process?

As concerned citizens, and members of the signed organizations, we demand transparency with each investigation. We demand answers and justice. Going forward, we call for honest and forthcoming communications and discussions with the community regarding the preventive, de-escalating measures and training that are adopted and will be adopted by the law enforcement to prevent tragic incidents like this from happening again.

We further demand the following immediately:

1. An independent investigation into the police shooting death of Dr. Yan Li.
2. The San Diego Police and San Diego County Sheriff's Department host a town hall meeting to provide full account of the incident, answer community questions and explain the proper protocol and procedure when conducting to serve the notice to evict.
3. Implementation of de-escalation training comparable to the best practice in our country for all law enforcement officers.
4. Mandatory training for law enforcement officers to recognize and appropriately deal with people with mental health issues.

With a heavy heart and sincere condolences to Dr. Li's family,

**Alliance of Chinese Americans San Diego**

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*ACA is inviting organizations and individuals to sign this statement*

*For organizations, please click [here](#)*

*For individuals, please click [here](#)*