

# de Volkskrant

## Complaints Committee blames Amsterdam police chief Frank Paauw for statements on killing of confused man

After officers shot and killed 23-year-old Sammy Baker in 2020, Amsterdam police chief Frank Paauw went too far with his statements in the media. He stated without evidence that the victim had stabbed at officers with a knife and acted with "insufficient care".

Maud Effting and Mark Misérus June 18th 2022, 5:47pm



Police chief Frank Paauw explains Amsterdam security statistics for 2019.

Picture: Sem van der wal / ANP

Paauw also reacted too slowly to the complaint that Baker's parents had filed against him. That is the verdict of the complaints committee of the National Police, which ruled completely in favour of Baker's parents. With the ruling of the complaints committee Paauw gets a sensitive slap on the wrist. It is very rare for a complaint to be filed against a police chief.

Shortly after the death of 23-year-old Sammy Baker, a popular German fitness influencer, **police chief Paauw said in Het Parool that one of the officers involved 'had been stabbed in his vest by the suspect with a knife'. After investigation, however, it appeared that on the vest no stabbing damage could be seen.** The vest was examined twice by forensic experts, according to the parents' lawyer Richard Korver.

The parents, who live in Germany, have been asking the Amsterdam police chief for over a year to publicly rectify his statements and apologize. They feel that their son's name and their own name have been compromised by this and say that he may have influenced the officers, who had yet to be questioned by the Rijksrecherche. They filed a complaint in May last year.

'By stating facts instead of quoting sources, for example', the police chief 'acted with insufficient care in this extremely sensitive matter', the complaints committee of the National Police ruled. Paauw 'should have been aware of the effect that such factual statements could have in the media'. According to the committee, it was a 'conscious choice' of Paauw to express himself in the media and his words were 'too decisive'. The Committee also believes that insufficient dynamic action was taken after a complaint 'of a weight such as is at issue here'.

## **No apologies**

**Police chief Paauw refuses to apologize.** In a response on Saturday, he only informed that his statement was 'too adamant'. 'I should have been more cautious in my statement in the media shortly after the violent incident,' he said in his statement. **He wrote that the bottom line is that it would have been better for him to say that the suspect stabbed "in the direction of" the vest.**

Sammy Baker walked through a courtyard in August 2020 in a confused state with a knife at his throat after using cannabis for the first time in his life, according to his parents. As officers approached him with guns drawn, he was attacked unexpectedly from behind at the same time by an officer with a police dog. However, the dog ran past him, whereupon the dog handler tried to knock him down from behind. In a struggle, Baker then swung around and was shot. He died at the scene.

The mental health services later strongly criticized the police, stating that officers were insufficiently trained to deal with confused persons. **The Public Prosecutor eventually decided not to prosecute the two officers because they acted 'in self-defense'.**

## **Counterbalancing the media storm**

During the complaints committee hearing, Police Chief Paauw said that shortly after Baker's death there was 'a (social) media storm where there was talk of liquidation and murder'. He therefore felt the 'need to provide a context and to provide some counterbalance to the negative, critical claims on social media'. He said he had gone to the scene and heard firsthand from the two shooting officers what had happened.

**The parents eventually filed two complaints, both about an 'incorrect statement' and Paauw's slow handling. The complaints committee, which advises the chief of police of the National Police, agreed with them on both points.** Chief Constable Henk van Essen of the National Police declared both complaints to be justified. However, he thinks it is going too far to speak of an incorrect judgment. It is not possible to give absolute guarantees about that, even in retrospect. (...) It is not possible to say with certainty whether the knife was stabbed into the vest. According to Van Essen the statements were 'too decisive'.