

# de Volkskrant

## Complaint committee examines controversial remarks by police chief on execution of Sammy Baker

On Tuesday, Amsterdam police chief Frank Paauw will have to stand for his statements about the incident in which officers shot and killed a 23-year-old confused man in Amsterdam in August 2020. The man's parents had filed charges against Paauw last year.

Maud Effting und Mark Misérus May 10th 2022, 05:00



Demonstrators at a silent march for Sammy Baker demand "Justice for Sammy" Picture: Steffen Gross

The death of her son, a German fitness influencer, led to heavy criticism from the police psychiatric services. Shortly after the incident, police chief Paauw claimed in *Het Parool* that one of his officers "was stabbed in the jacket with a knife by the suspect." However, judicial documents obtained by the *Volkskrant* indicate that the vest was not damaged. According to lawyer Richard Korver, who represents the parents, the vest has been examined twice by forensic experts on behalf of the National Bureau of Investigation. The parents, who live in Germany, have been demanding for a year that the police chief publicly corrects his statements and apologizes. Paauw refuses to do so. He will be heard today in front of the independent National Police Complaints Commission. It is very unusual for a complaint to be filed against a police chief. According to a spokesman, this has happened only three times so far, and all of those complaints were declared partially justified. The decisions of grievance committees are not binding, but police often follow them.

Sammy Baker, 23, came to Amsterdam two years ago, where he consumed cannabis with his friends and probably fell into a psychosis. He was an athlete, not a drug addict," says mother Justine Seewald. On the day he died, Baker sat in the bushes with a knife in his underwear for minutes, barely responding.



*Sammy Baker "was an athlete, not a drug addict," mother Justine Seewald says*

## **Psycholance not deployed**

Eventually, a psycholance - a psychiatric ambulance - arrived, but to the parents' surprise, it was not deployed. Instead, officers approached Baker with guns drawn. As the young man began to walk away with the knife at his throat, a handler with a police dog approached unexpectedly from behind. The dog ran past him, whereupon the handler attempted to knock him down. In the ensuing struggle, Baker dodged and was shot. He died on the spot.

His parents heavily incriminate Paauw, who is in charge of the Amsterdam police, with his statements. In their opinion, he influenced the investigation of the case and tried to prevent the prosecution of his officers. They hadn't even heard of the policeman with the vest at the time," says Mother Seewald. They feel personally attacked because, in their opinion, their son was wrongly accused by the police chief of stabbing a police officer.

Paauw does not want to apologize, he previously wrote to the complaint committee, because it was "never my intention to influence people." He "regrets" that his remarks may have offended someone, but he stands by his words. According to him, they were necessary to "counterbalance the negative, critical allegations that have been made on social media about the actions of the officers." In this way, I place myself protectively in front of my staff," Paauw wrote.

Paauw says he relied on information from the officers involved at the time. Although the State Bureau of Criminal Investigation has found no evidence of this, he says "it also cannot be ruled out that the vest was hit."

## **Left alone**

The charges against Paauw make it clear once again that Baker's parents and the police are completely at odds with each other. They feel abandoned by the Dutch authorities and are not satisfied with the conclusions of the National Criminal Police, which did not want to prosecute the officers involved because they acted in self-defense.

Baker's parents don't believe that. My son was confused," Seewald says. 'He wasn't threatening anybody. He needed help.' To find out more details, the parents themselves were seeking witnesses and parties involved who might know more about that fateful day in 2020. In the meantime, they filed a lawsuit seeking a "fair investigation," according to their attorney, Korver. The judge granted their request to have the case investigated by two independent experts.

The Department of Psychiatry had earlier sharply criticized the police's approach. For example, psychiatrist and chairman of the Dutch Psychiatric

Association, Elnathan Prinsen, said the officers had not acted in a de-escalating manner and had received little training in defusing threatening situations involving confused people.

Dealing with disturbed individuals poses increasing problems for police. In February, a study found that 84% of people who died after contact with police exhibited confused behavior. Often, this behavior was related to excessive drug or alcohol use or a history of such use.