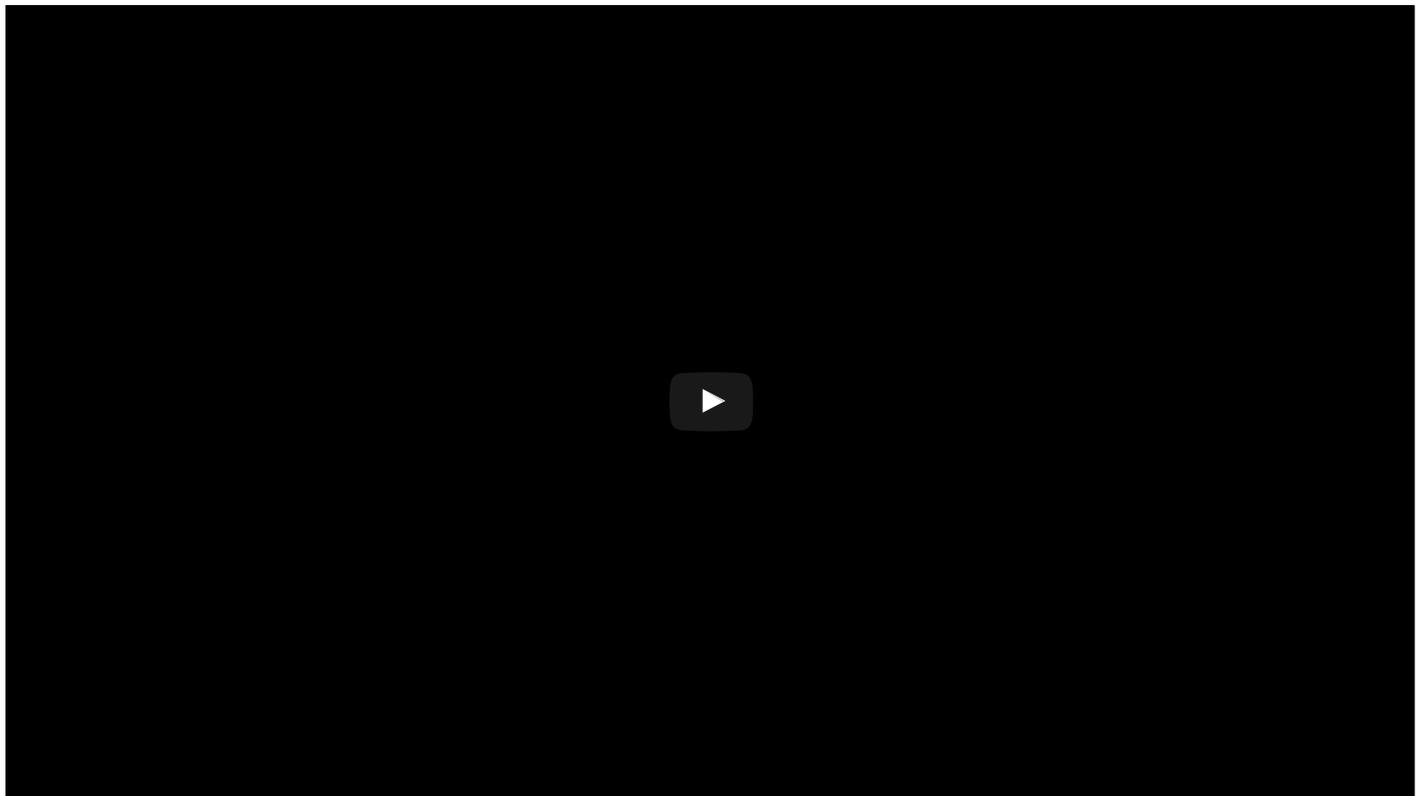


Protest follows 'unfair' arrest of 18-year-old black woman - The Daily Cardinal

The Madison Police Department arrested an 18-year-old black woman Tuesday afternoon at East Towne Mall. The arrest, which family and friends of the woman labeled “unfair” and violent, later led to a protest organized by members of Freedom Inc. inside the Dane County Public Safety Building.

The arrested woman, Genele Laird, reportedly made threats to a Taco Bell employee, displayed a knife and later fought with MPD officers, spitting in their face and kicking and scratching the officers, according to an [MPD incident report](#). The confrontation began in the East Towne Mall food court when Laird questioned a Taco Bell employee who may have stolen her phone.

The [violent arrest](#) was captured on video by a witness at the scene. MPD officers can be seen kneeling, shoving and later tasing Laird, who is currently being charged with disorderly conduct while armed, resisting police, battery to a police officer and discharge of bodily fluids.



The two officers were transported to a local hospital and treated for injuries.

President and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Madison Ruben L. Anthony said he was outraged by the "savage" and "excessive" force the two white officers used on a "petite African American woman." He said he will continue to monitor the situation to ensure Laird's "civil and human rights are protected."

The arrest comes shortly after Madison City Council approved an increase of funding for an outside review of MPD now totaling \$400,000.

MPD Chief Mike Koval met with family members of Laird, Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County, state Rep. Chris Taylor, D-Madison, six City Council members and other local leaders to discuss the arrest. The family members later said they appreciated Chief Koval's willingness to meet with them.

The family members called for an empathetic approach and asked for people to not vilify a "120-pound 18-year-old" woman. An aunt of Laird described her as hardworking and said she was already an assistant manager at her job.

Johnson said Koval indicated that the knife was recovered from Laird's purse. He also said the family members want Laird's charges to be dropped and for her to instead be put in a restorative justice program.

Although some protesters at the scene issued stronger demands. Alix Shabazz, a member of Freedom Inc. who helped lead the protest of roughly 40 demonstrators, said she wants the charges dropped outright.

"[Freedom Inc. is] not demanding for a restorative justice practice as that itself criminalizes her," Shabazz said.

She went on to say that Freedom Inc. is demanding that all of the four charges against Laird be dropped, for her to receive medical attention, charges against the arresting officers and for community control of MPD. Shabazz also likened the arrest of Laird to the numerous instances of high-profile hate and bias on UW-Madison's campus throughout the Spring semester.

"We see the violence that happens to black students on campus to be inextricably linked to the violence that happens to black community folks," Shabazz said. "We know that the violence that happened to Genele Laird is not different than King Shabazz being taken out of school."

Shabazz encouraged black UW-Madison students as well as other allies to join the Freedom Inc. movement and show their support at upcoming protests and demonstrations.

UPDATE June 22 12:15 p.m.: *This story has been updated to include an additional response from a community leader and the full video of the arrest.*