

# Trump's worst pardon is one you haven't heard about

Alex Busansky Dec. 29, 2020 at 12:29 p.m. PST



Stephanie Mohr arrives at a federal courthouse in 2001. (Robert A. Reeder/The Washington Post)

Roger Stone, Paul Manafort, Charles Kushner, Stephanie Mohr. You've probably heard about President Trump's odious pre-Christmas [pardons](#) for the first three — and nothing about Mohr, a former Prince George's County police officer. But [Mohr's pardon](#) — for violating a homeless man's civil rights by unleashing her K-9 on him — is equally, if not more undeserving.

Of all the acts to pardon in a year that witnessed the killing of [George Floyd](#), it is the most insensitive and inflaming.

I know; I was part of the team at the Justice Department's civil rights division that helped [prosecute Mohr](#) in 2001.

In the middle of the night on Sept. 21, 1995, a local Prince George's County police burglary stakeout unit [found two homeless men](#) on the empty roof of a business, eating food they had found in the trash in Takoma Park, Md. Ordered down from the roof, Ricardo Mendez and his friend willingly climbed down. Lit by a police helicopter above and facing a brick wall, the two men were surrounded by police officers, some with guns drawn, and Mohr holding her German shepherd on a leash. Both men obeyed commands and stood facing the wall with their hands up.

It should have been over. It wasn't.

A police sergeant later testified that he was approached by Mohr's supervising officer who [said](#), "Hey Sarge, we got a new dog. Mind if it gets a bite?" The sergeant gave consent, and Mohr set her dog to attack Mendez, an undocumented immigrant whose only crime was seeking a safe place to eat and sleep. Mohr testified that she was doing her job as trained, and the victim needed "only 10 stitches."

Think about that: only 10 stitches. Mohr disregarded her training to give her dog a taste of flesh and blood.

This was no accident or split-second mistake. It was a willful and deliberate act of police brutality. It was also not Mohr's first — and there was a pattern to the violence. [Evidence at trial showed](#) that Mohr had previously released her dog on a Black teenager sleeping in a hammock in his own backyard. She had [threatened](#) the relatives of a fugitive that she would let her dog

attack their “black ass” if they did not tell her where he was. There were other incidents that the jury did not even learn about, including one in which Mohr put her dog into a trash dumpster to attack a man who had fled from police.

At trial, in addition to the police sergeant at the scene who pleaded guilty and went to jail for his role, numerous police officer witnesses testified about the incident. The jury convicted Mohr and the presiding judge gave her a significant prison sentence. A unanimous panel of judges on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit, one of the most conservative appellate courts in the country, [affirmed her conviction](#). Mohr was released after serving a 10-year sentence.

In early December, Mohr made a direct appeal to the president for a pardon by [going on Newsmax](#). She spewed falsehoods about the case, claiming she had been made a scapegoat. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The [White House statement](#) announcing her pardon noted that it reflected her “service and the lengthy term that Ms. Mohr served in prison,” adding, “Officer Mohr was a highly commended member of the police force prior to her prosecution.” Actually, she had been [sued at least four times](#) for brutality, was twice found to have made false statements to a superior and was flagged as a potential problem officer by the department’s early warning system.

It should be no surprise that on the night in question, Mohr saw these two undocumented homeless men as little more than something for her dog to practice on. In those days, the Prince George’s police department was known for brazen and routine abuse of force. A Justice Department review of the police force had resulted in a litany of changes to its use-of-force protocols. The author Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote about their routine brutality in

his book, "[Between the World and Me](#)."

Today, as we face calls for reducing police budgets, ending the militarization of law enforcement, and enacting new laws prohibiting chokeholds and other techniques, there will still be significant structural challenges to policing, along with officers who commit abuse. Mohr's conviction demonstrated that abusive officers can be held accountable — when there is a meaningful commitment to enforcing civil rights laws.

Trump's pardon of Mohr sends a reckless message to law enforcement and emboldens bad officers. It shows the president's disdain, not just for the victims of police abuse, but for honest law enforcement officers who follow their training, see the humanity in all people, and do their job with respect and decency.

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