

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Net) — Riot police firing tear gas scattered a protest crowd from a downtown Louisville square Monday night, hours after the firing of the city's police chief in the uproar over the early morning shooting death of a popular restaurant owner by security forces.

David McAtee, the owner of a barbecue spot who was known for offering meals to police officers, died while police and National Guard soldiers were enforcing a curfew early Monday amid waves of protests over a previous police shooting in Kentucky's largest city. Police said they were responding to gunfire from a crowd.

Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer announced the firing of Police Chief Steve Conrad at a news conference Monday. He said officers involved in the shooting failed to activate body cameras at the chaotic scene. Authorities had sought footage for their investigation, after Kentucky's governor demanded the release of police video.

"This type of institutional failure will not be tolerated," Fischer said. "Accordingly, I have relieved Steve Conrad of his duties as chief of Louisville Metro Police Department."

Gov. Andy Beshear later called the lack of body camera footage unacceptable.

"This is the entire reason that we have those cameras," the Democratic governor said at the state Capitol in Frankfort.

Beshear authorized state police to independently investigate, promising the probe will be conducted in an "honest and transparent way that will not take months."

U.S. Attorney Russell Coleman announced that federal authorities will be part of the investigation.

The governor said he had counted on body camera footage to help determine "the truth in a way that spoke for itself, at a time when trust is difficult and people deserve to be able to see and evaluate."

Late Monday afternoon, a huge group stretching several city blocks marched peacefully from downtown Louisville to the spot where McAtee was shot. Some motorists honked horns and raised fists in solidarity.

Hundreds of protesters regrouped later Monday night at downtown Jefferson Square and riot police standing shoulder to shoulder advanced amid bursts of fired tear gas, dispersing the crowd. Military-style vehicles could later be seen occupying the emptied-out square.

The shakeup at the top of the city's police department came a month earlier than expected.

Conrad had previously announced his resignation, which was to take effect at the end of June. Deputy Chief Robert Schroeder will step in immediately as chief, Fischer said.

The mayor also said the city's curfew was being extended until June 8.

Police did retrieve video from crime center cameras that showed how the shooting unfolded, Schroeder said.

Two Louisville officers and two Guard soldiers returned fire, he said. The two officers violated policy by not wearing or activating body cameras, Schroeder said, adding they have been placed on administrative leave.

McAtee, whose YaYa's BBQ Shack is near where the shooting occurred, was mourned by hundreds.

Christopher 2X, an anti-violence activist and executive director of the group Game Changers, said McAtee was well-liked.

"I've never known him to be aggressive in any kind of way," he said.

Schroeder agreed that McAtee was friendly to police officers. "Over the years he's been a good

friend to the police officers ... frequently making sure our officers had a good meal on their shifts," he said.

Before his dismissal, Conrad confirmed the shooting happened around 12:15 a.m. Monday outside a food market on West Broadway, where police and the National Guard had been called to break up a group of curfew violators.

Someone fired a shot at law enforcement officials, and both soldiers and officers returned fire, he said. Several "persons of interest" were being interviewed, he said.

News outlets showed video taken by someone in a car parked at a gas station. It recorded the sound of bullets being fired as groups of police and Guard soldiers crouched behind cars.

Kris Smith said he was at a restaurant — "just outside having a good time, having drinks, eating barbecue" — when the soldiers arrived.

"As soon as I walk to my car they jump out with the sticks, the police jump out with their sticks and their shields and stuff on," Smith said. "It looked like something out of a movie. It looked like a freaking war zone."

He said he heard a loud noise, then gunfire minutes later.

Smith, who is black, said the group had nothing to do with the protests.

Protesters have been demanding justice for Breonna Taylor, a black woman killed in her home in Louisville in March. The 26-year-old EMT was shot eight times by narcotics detectives who knocked down her front door as they attempted to enforce a search warrant. No drugs were found in the home.

After Taylor's death, the mayor said Louisville police would be required to wear body cameras.