

POLITICS

Protester blinded in one eye at OC protest is among string of violent run-ins with federal agents

By AMY TAXIN **AP**

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A demonstrator was hit in the face with a projectile fired by a federal officer during a Santa Ana protest, leaving him blind in his left eye, according to family.

SANTA ANA, Calif -- A 21-year-old college student who said he was [blinded in one eye](#) by a projectile fired by a federal officer during an Orange County protest said he faces a drastically different life now.

Kaden Rummler said in an interview that he was in agonizing pain and underwent an extensive six-hour surgery to his left eye after he was injured at a Jan. 9 protest over the

fatal shooting of a woman by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer in Minneapolis. Rummler said he has no depth perception and can no longer drive. Shards of metal and a nickel-sized piece of plastic remain lodged in his skull, his attorney said, and he is considering suing.

"It's going to affect every aspect of my life," said Rummler, who hopes to pursue a career in forestry.

A second demonstrator at the same protest outside a federal immigration building in Santa Ana [told the Los Angeles Times](#) he was also blinded in one eye by a projectile fired by federal agents. Britain Rodriguez, 31, said he was standing on steps outside the immigration building when he was struck in the face.

"I remember hitting the ground and feeling like my eye exploded in my head," Rodriguez told the newspaper.

The Department of Homeland Security didn't respond to questions from The Associated Press about what type of projectile was used. Tricia McLaughlin, assistant secretary for the agency, said in an emailed statement this week that the protesters were violent and that two officers were injured but didn't specify the extent of their injuries. DHS said one demonstrator was taken to the hospital with a cut. McLaughlin confirmed to the Times that was a reference to Rummler and called his injury claims "absurd."

Rummler has been charged with a misdemeanor count of disorderly conduct. One of his fellow protesters was jailed for several days and has been charged with assaulting, resisting or impeding a federal officer.

Rummler's attorney John Washington said doctors want to know whether the materials in the projectile could be toxic but have been unable to get answers from DHS. Washington said based on their preliminary investigation they believe it was a capsule made from metal and plastic containing pepper spray.



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Kaden Rummler was injured after being hit with a projectile fired by a federal agent during a protest outside an immigration building in Santa Ana.

AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes

The injuries in California are the latest in a growing number of violent encounters between federal agents and community members during protests over the Trump administration's immigration crackdown.

Federal immigration agents deployed to Minneapolis have used aggressive crowd-control tactics that have become a dominant concern after the deadly shooting of Renee Good.

In Santa Ana, hundreds of people marched in the streets on Jan. 9 to protest Good's killing. A smaller group later congregated outside the federal immigration building, shouting expletives through megaphones about ICE, according to video taken by OC Hawk, a group that films breaking news in Orange County.

The video shows a handful of officers in riot gear standing guard and urging demonstrators to move back. An orange cone is later seen rolling onto a plaza outside the building, and authorities begin firing crowd-control projectiles as they walk toward the crowd.

In the video, an officer is seen grabbing a protester by the arm and Rummler and a few others are seen stepping forward shouting in response. An officer then fires a crowd-

control weapon, striking Rummler from several feet away. Rummler grabs his face and falls to the ground, and an officer grabs him by the shirt and drags him backward across the ground toward the building, the video shows. Later, video appears to show him face down on the ground being handcuffed.

Rummler said he joined the protest against immigration authorities because he can't stand seeing families torn from their homes. Despite his injuries, he said he would do it again.

"I refuse to sit around idly and watch that happen, and in 50 years, I would absolutely regret not trying to make a change," he said.

Washington, a civil rights lawyer, said his client could have been killed.

"Any officers with just the most basic training would know you don't shoot someone ever in the face with this, but let alone at point-blank range, and that's because it is a lethal weapon when used like that, and it very nearly was," Washington said.

Geoffrey Alpert, a professor of criminology and criminal justice at University of South Carolina, said a thorough investigation is needed into the reason for using a high level of force in that situation.

"I don't know of any projectile where you train to shoot at that close range," Alpert said.

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