



**Pittsfield Police Department
Media Release**

******For Immediate Release******

Subject: Preliminary Findings of the Force Investigation Team (FIT)

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Authorized By: Chief Michael Wynn

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On March 25, 2022 shortly after 10 PM, the Pittsfield Police Dispatch Unit was contacted by a third party, requesting assistance for an individual at 279 Onota Street. Officers responded, where they encountered Miguel Estrella and another individual on the adjacent roadway, Woodbine Avenue. The same responding Officers had assisted Mr. Estrella minutes before, leaving him in the care of a third party due to his level of intoxication. This subsequent interaction resulted in one of the responding Officers discharging his issued firearm, striking Mr. Estrella. Officers on scene rendered medical care and Mr. Estrella was transported to Berkshire Medical Center, where he later died.

This outcome is tragic. The Pittsfield Police Department extends sincere condolences to the family and friends of Mr. Estrella. The Department also recognizes the impact on the Pittsfield community, and extends great effort in:

- Following established protocols
- Navigating unexpected factors
- Complying with new/changing state/national requirements

We strive for transparency to the extent permitted by statute, policy, and best practices in order to build and maintain the trust of the citizens we serve and protect.

Providing support to our involved personnel during all stages of the fact-finding process is also of great importance, as the impact on them is significant. Officer involved shooting incidents are among the most stressful for a first responder to experience, no matter the outcome.

The following information details the timeline and preliminary findings of the Force Investigation Team:

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In compliance with Department Policy, Chief Wynn convened the Force Investigation Team (FIT) on March 26 to conduct an administrative inquiry and determine if the uses of force complied with relevant policies and training guidelines.

FIT submitted their preliminary report on April 8. Upon review, Chief Wynn recognized the need for additional work, due to new reporting and evaluation requirements contained in the Criminal Justice Reform Act of 2020 and the Commonwealth's Use of Force Regulations.

On April 14, Chief Wynn returned the report to the FIT and directed them to re-evaluate the uses of force in compliance with the new statutes/regulations.

On April 21, the FIT re-submitted their revised preliminary report. Both calls for service involving Mr. Estrella on March 25 were examined, evaluating the uses of force relative to the Department's policies on Use of Force, Conducted Energy Weapons, Crisis Intervention Incidents, and Civil Commitments. Statutory requirements and Code of Massachusetts Regulations (CMR's) were also examined.

Based on a review of the evidence and information available to the Department during the initial call for service to 279 Onota Street, Mr. Estrella did not meet the criteria of a "person in crisis." According to information provided to the responding Officers and EMS by Mr. Estrella and witnesses on scene, he was not engaged in any self-harming behavior, and made no threats and/or statements of self-harm at that time. All parties reported that his visible existing injury had occurred earlier in the day. Mr. Estrella refused both treatment and transport to the hospital by EMS. On the basis of this information, Mr. Estrella did not meet the criteria for a civil commitment under MGL Chapter 123, Section 12A. Officers adhered to both relevant department policies and the applicable laws and regulations.

Upon arrival to the subsequent call for service to 279 Onota Street, Officer Christopher Coffey immediately observed Mr. Estrella engaged in a physical altercation with a third party. Officer Coffey was able to see that Mr. Estrella was armed with a large knife and that he was within an arm's length of a female party. Officer Coffey further observed that, at one point, Mr. Estrella moved towards the female with the knife raised in a threatening manner. Officer Coffey assessed the risk to both this female and himself (based on his proximity to Mr. Estrella) as a deadly threat. Despite this deadly threat, and anticipating that his backup Officer was seconds away,



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Officer Coffey drew his TASER (less-lethal force option) and attempted to de-escalate Mr. Estrella. When Mr. Estrella observed Officer Coffey, he immediately turned his attention away from the female and towards Officer Coffey. Mr. Estrella then began to move towards Officer Coffey. Officer Coffey continued to attempt to create distance and de-escalate Mr. Estrella so that he would stop advancing and drop the knife. When Mr. Estrella did not comply, Officer Coffey discharged his TASER. The TASER briefly distracted Mr. Estrella and appeared to have a minimal effect, but it did not incapacitate Mr. Estrella.

While Officer Coffey was continuing to verbally engage, create distance, and deploy his TASER, Officer Nicholas Sondrini had arrived on scene. Seeing Officer Coffey's ineffective TASER deployment, Officer Sondrini immediately deployed his TASER in an attempt to incapacitate Mr. Estrella. Officer Sondrini's TASER deployment was ineffective. Officer Coffey then triggered a subsequent TASER cycle, which was also ineffective. At several points during the attempts to incapacitate Mr. Estrella with TASER deployments, the female party's positioning and close proximity to Mr. Estrella placed her in danger of becoming injured by means of Mr. Estrella's knife.

Following Officer Sondrini's TASER deployment, Mr. Estrella took a fighting stance, raising his fists with a knife in one hand and advanced toward the Officers. Recognizing that Mr. Estrella's continued assaultive behavior, refusal to comply with any verbal commands, and failure to respond to de-escalation techniques presented an imminent deadly threat to himself, Officer Coffey, and the female party, Officer Sondrini then transitioned from his TASER to his firearm. Both Officers continued to create distance and engage Mr. Estrella verbally, physically restraining the female party from approaching Mr. Estrella, and requesting additional less-lethal options to the scene. Mr. Estrella continued advancing on the Officers until they had reached the middle of Onota Street, and traffic traveled dangerously close to their position.

At this point, Mr. Estrella turned and focused his attention on Officer Sondrini. He bladed his body, clenched his fists while still holding the knife, raised them upward, and moved toward Officer Sondrini at a fast pace. Recognizing this eminent deadly threat within a few feet of his position, Officer Sondrini fired 2 rounds from his firearm, striking Mr. Estrella with both rounds. The Officers immediately disarmed Mr. Estrella and rendered medical treatment.



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Initial estimates of the distance Officers retreated between the TASER deployments and the shots fired is 120 feet.

On the basis of the preliminary FIT report, Officer Coffey's TASER deployment in response to a perceived imminent deadly threat is in compliance with all relevant department policies, training guidelines, statutory requirements, and use of force guidelines.

On the basis of the preliminary FIT report, Officer Sondrini's TASER deployment and subsequent use of his firearm in response to a perceived imminent deadly threat is in compliance with all relevant department policies, training guidelines, statutory requirements, and use of force guidelines.

The Force Investigation Team will submit their complete report in the coming weeks.

The Berkshire District Attorney's Office is conducting a separate, independent criminal investigation into the shooting. That investigation remains ongoing.

Officer Christopher Coffey is a decorated 4-year veteran of the Pittsfield Police Department. He joined the Department in January 2018. In 2019 he received a Weapons Seizure Commendation. He is a member of the Berkshire County Special Response Team and PPD's Anti Street-Crimes Unit.

Officer Nicholas Sondrini is a decorated 9-year veteran of the Pittsfield Police Department. He joined the Department in January 2013. In 2016 he received a Unit Citation Commendation for assisting in locating a missing person. In 2016 he also received a Lifesaving Commendation. He is a member of the Berkshire County Special Response Team and PPD's K9 Unit.

Both Officers had been on Administrative Leave since the evening of March 25. Today, their status was modified to Limited-Duty (non-enforcement status), where they are authorized to resume non-enforcement duties. This includes, but is not limited to participation in qualifications, appointments, and evaluations of varying nature.

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