



RANDY MCGINLEY  
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OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
ALCOVY JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

December 29, 2025

**Death of Amaro Heron:**

On October 29, 2025, officers with the Covington Police Department (CPD) responded to an apartment in the Magnolia Heights apartment complex. Upon arrival, they encountered Camron Hayes and Lashay Taylor outside the apartment. Officers entered the apartment and located Amaro Heron deceased from an apparent gunshot wound. Investigators and crime-scene specialists with CPD were called to the scene. The District Attorney's Office was notified, and an Investigator and Assistant District Attorney from my office responded to assist.

Officers were dispatched based on a 911 call by Hayes. Hayes told dispatchers that someone was breaking into the apartment and that he had shot the person. Officers observed that the door to the apartment had been kicked in, noting that the door frame was broken and the door handle was bent. At the scene, Taylor told an officer that she and Hayes were asleep when they heard a loud bang at the front door. The person who broke into the apartment then began coming toward the bedroom. It was then that Hayes shot the person. It was not until after the shooting that Taylor realized it was Heron, who had not recently been living at the apartment, who had broken down the door to enter the apartment.

My Office is often involved early in homicide investigations due to their complex and serious nature. Early involvement assists prosecutors when later handling a case in court. Additionally, the District Attorney's Office has a statutory duty to "advise law enforcement officers concerning the sufficiency of evidence, warrants, and similar matters relating to the investigation and prosecution of criminal offenses." OCGA § 15-18-6 (8). While we assisted CPD throughout this matter, CPD was the lead investigative agency.

To be clear, from the time I was first advised of the nature of this investigation, I believe it is both legally and factually complicated. This is not a common scenario, and the length of this letter reflects its complexity. This tragic set of facts has led to my legal conclusion that there will not be any prosecution action taken in Heron's death based on the investigation that was provided to my office.

As more fully explained below, the investigation shows that Hayes and Taylor subjectively and reasonably objectively did not know who had violently entered the apartment by kicking in the door. Taylor took steps to try to determine who it was, but her phone showed that both Heron and another friend that stayed in the apartment at times were not at the apartment. Heron had previously moved out of the apartment and was not living there at the time. Hayes was aware that Taylor did not know who had broken into the apartment. Hayes and Taylor then observed this person coming towards the bedroom in the dark. The fact that this person was actually Heron, who

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was on the lease of the apartment, was not known (subjectively and objectively) to Hayes or Taylor until after Hayes had fired his handgun. Ultimately, the investigation did not produce evidence to show that Hayes was not justified under Georgia's defense-of-habitation law.

Below, I explain:

1. The burden of proof under which I reviewed this matter;
2. My conclusion based on the information available at this time;
3. A summary of the applicable law;
4. A summary of the relevant facts;
5. The application of the law to those facts; and
6. Then I end by summarizing my conclusion.

Before doing so, however, I recognize the profound tragedy that Amaro Heron's death represents for his family, friends, and the community. With that in mind, I have already met with his family members to explain my conclusion and the reasoning behind it. These meetings were intended to allow Heron's family to hear directly from me and to ask any questions they may have. Those meetings – lasting hours – were attended by members of my team who assisted in this case, as well as investigators with CPD.

**The Burden of proof under which I reviewed this matter:**

As a prosecutor, I must view any investigation under the lens of the appropriate burden of proof. Generally, there are two burdens of proof to consider. First, for law enforcement to obtain a warrant, there must be sufficient evidence for a magistrate judge to find probable cause. In this case, CPD investigators did not seek warrants based on the evidence from their investigation. Similarly, for a grand jury to indict an individual, there must be sufficient evidence for the grand jury to find probable cause. To ultimately convict a person of a crime, however, the State must prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

When evidence suggests the possibility that a person's actions were justified, two additional legal burdens must be considered. First, a defendant may seek immunity from prosecution by showing, by a preponderance of the evidence, that his or her actions were justified. If a court finds justification by that standard, it must dismiss the case. Second, at trial, a defendant has no burden to prove justification. Instead, the State must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant's actions were not justified.

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**My conclusion based on the information available at this time:**

With those legal standards in mind, based on the facts established by the investigation into Heron's death and the applicable law, it is my determination that there will be no further prosecutorial action and the case will not be presented to a grand jury. This decision is based on the evidence as it exists at this time.

**A summary of the applicable law:**

The general self-defense or defense of others statute, OCGA § 16-3-21 (a) provides in part:

"A person is justified in threatening or using force against another when and to the extent that he or she reasonably believes that such threat or force is necessary to defend himself or herself or a third person against such other's imminent use of unlawful force; however, except as provided in Code Section 16-3-23, a person is justified in using force which is intended or likely to cause death or great bodily harm only if he or she reasonably believes that such force is necessary to prevent death or great bodily injury to himself or herself or a third person or to prevent the commission of a forcible felony."

This statute makes clear that deadly force may generally be used only when a person reasonably believes he or she is facing deadly force or a forcible felony. However, the statute expressly references an exception: OCGA § 16-3-23, the defense-of-habitation statute.

Georgia's defense of habitation statute provides:

"A person is justified in threatening or using force against another when and to the extent that he or she reasonably believes that such threat or force is necessary to prevent or terminate such other's unlawful entry into or attack upon a habitation; however, such person is justified in the use of force which is intended or likely to cause death or great bodily harm only if:

- (1) The entry is made or attempted in a violent and tumultuous manner and he or she reasonably believes that the entry is attempted or made for the purpose of assaulting or offering personal violence to any person dwelling or being therein and that such force is necessary to prevent the assault or offer of personal violence;
- (2) That force is used against another person who is not a member of the family or household and who unlawfully and forcibly enters or has unlawfully and forcibly entered the residence and the person using such force knew or had reason to believe that an unlawful and forcible entry occurred; or
- (3) The person using such force reasonably believes that the entry is made or attempted for the purpose of committing a felony therein and that such force is necessary to prevent the commission of the felony.

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Georgia law also provides that there is no duty to retreat relating to the use of force pursuant to both self-defense/defense of others under OCGA § 16-3-21 and defense of habitation under OCGA § 16-3-23. A person has “no duty to retreat and has the right to stand his or her ground and use force as provided in said Code sections, including deadly force.”

Another additional relevant statute is Georgia’s mistake-of-fact law, OCGA § 16-3-5, which provides that “[a] person shall not be found guilty of a crime if the act or omission to act constituting the crime was induced by a misapprehension of fact which, if true, would have justified the act or omission.”

These statutes use of the term “reasonably” means that a person’s use of force must be objectively reasonable. Legally, this is what a reasonable person would believe if placed in the same situation and possessing the same knowledge – or lack of knowledge – as the defendant at the time. A reasonable person a person from our jury pool. What would a juror or grand juror reasonably believe is the question I ask when attempting to determine what is reasonable.

**A summary of the relevant facts:**

CPD’s investigation showed the following:

Heron and Taylor had been in a multi-year relationship and both were listed on the lease of the apartment, a 2-bedroom unit. However, since January 2025, their relationship had been what Taylor called “on and off.” Heron had not been regularly staying at the apartment but would come and go from the apartment at times. Taylor indicated that Heron would generally text her before he came over. Taylor indicated that they had broken up about two weeks before October 29, 2025. Heron moved in with his mother to the Arbor Lakes Apartments. Taylor had last spoken to Heron on October 27 when she took items over to Heron’s mother’s house.

Taylor and Hayes had known each other since high school and began spending time together around April 2025. Hayes had stayed overnight at the apartment with Taylor multiple times prior to October 29.

In the days prior to October 29, 2025, Heron did not have a key to the apartment because Taylor had given Heron’s key to a friend so that friend could move some items into the apartment. Taylor had another friend, “J,” (using just an initial here because this individual was not present or involved) who, at times, would stay in the other bedroom in the apartment.

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On October 28, Heron sent Taylor a text message. However, Taylor did not respond. Taylor was delivering for DoorDash and Instacart that evening until about midnight. She picked up Hayes and they both went to the apartment where they fell asleep together in the bedroom.

On the morning of October 29, while Taylor and Hayes were still asleep, Heron arrived at the Magnolia Heights apartments by Uber. He brought with him multiple bags. He then went to the apartment unit where Taylor and Hayes were sleeping. Taylor and Hayes were awakened by a loud knock on the exterior door of the apartment. Upon waking up from the loud knock, Taylor checked her phone in an attempt to determine who was at the door. At first, she believed it was "J." Taylor checked Life360 which showed that "J" was not at the apartment. Then, Taylor checked Heron's location using the "find my" phone app. This showed that Heron was at his mother's apartment. Hayes was aware that Taylor could not determine who it was from her checking her phone.

Taylor and Hayes then heard another loud knock followed by the exterior door being kicked in. Taylor got up and approached the bedroom door. Hayes grabbed his handgun and positioned himself near a dresser in the bedroom. The apartment was completely dark with no lights on. Taylor began to open the bedroom door slightly and saw a dark figure opening the door at the same time. Hayes told Taylor to move out of the way and fired three shots at the person at the bedroom door. The person was struck and fell. Once Taylor turned on a light, she realized it was Heron. Taylor began to cry and called her mother. Hayes called 911 to report that he had shot a person who had kicked in the apartment door.

Taylor told investigators that she did not know it was Heron in the apartment until after Hayes had shot him. Hayes also stated he did not know who had come into the apartment. He did not know it was someone that Taylor knew until she turned on the lights and recognized the person as Heron. He told investigators that he did not know another man was living or had lived in the apartment.

Taylor allowed investigators to look through her cell phone. Investigators observed the text message from Heron to Taylor on October 28 and confirmed that there was no response from Taylor. Investigators did find that Heron had called Taylor twice at approximately 6:55 am on October 29. However, Taylor's phone was on "do not disturb" and she was not aware of those calls. Investigator's observed that Heron's phone was still showing at his mother's residence on Taylor's "find my" phone app.

Individuals present in neighboring apartments were interviewed. They reported hearing loud knocking, then what sounded like a door being kicked in, and then gunshots. Some neighbors knew Heron and some neighbors had previously seen Hayes at the apartment.

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911 records show that Hayes called at 7:43 am on October 29. Law enforcement was quickly dispatched to that location with records showing them arriving approximately 3 minutes after the call. Officers found Heron in the hall at the door of the bedroom. He was unresponsive and later pronounced dead. A subsequent autopsy showed that he had been shot 3 times and died as a result of the gunshot wounds.

Investigators searched and processed the apartment. This includes utilizing a 3D imaging system that the Newton County Sheriff's Office brought to the scene. Both Taylor and Hayes were advised of their Miranda rights and voluntarily spoke at length with investigators. They both also agreed to allow investigators to search their cell phones. Investigators also searched Heron's cell phone. The crime scene and cell phone evidence supported and corroborated what Taylor and Hayes told investigators.

**The application of the law to those facts:**

Georgia's laws regarding justified use of deadly force apply the same whether someone ultimately dies or not. They also apply the same regardless of how tragic the outcome.

Georgia's law on defense-of-habitation is essentially a codification of what is known as the "Castle Doctrine." This Doctrine dates back to old English common law supporting the premise that a person's home is their castle. It is undeniable that Georgia law gives strong protection to those inside of a residence that use force to prevent or stop an unlawful and violent entry into that residence.

According to the statutes cited above, a person has the right to use deadly force when he reasonably believes that such force is necessary to prevent or terminate another's unlawful entry into or attack upon a habitation and one of the following:

1. The entry is made or attempted in a violent and tumultuous manner and he or she reasonably believes that the entry is attempted or made for the purpose of assaulting or offering personal violence to any person dwelling or being therein and that such force is necessary to prevent the assault or offer of personal violence;
2. That force is used against another person who is not a member of the family or household and who unlawfully and forcibly enters or has unlawfully and forcibly entered the residence and the person using such force knew or had reason to believe that an unlawful and forcible entry occurred; or
3. The person using such force reasonably believes that the entry is made or attempted for the purpose of committing a felony therein and that such force is necessary to prevent the commission of the felony.

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Before applying the facts of this investigation to those 3 subsections that dictate when deadly force can be used in defense-of-habitation, I will address 2 relevant legal questions: (1) Does defense of habitation apply to Hayes? and (2) Was Heron's entry "unlawful"?

Hayes had the right to defend the apartment and those within it. Hayes stayed overnight with Taylor. Hayes had stayed overnight multiple nights before. Hayes as an overnight guest, has a Fourth Amendment expectation of privacy in the apartment. I cannot say that an overnight guest possessing an expectation of privacy in a residence does not also have the legal right to defend that residence under Georgia's defense-of-habitation law. Similarly, if Taylor and Hayes had paid for a hotel room for the night, there is no doubt that Hayes could legally protect that room, which was his habitation for the night. Legally, it is my determination that Hayes's actions fall under the defense-of-habitation statute.

I also answer the second question in the affirmative, but with an explanation. Hayes (and Taylor) believed that Heron's entry into the apartment was unlawful. Even if I assume that Heron, who was on the lease but had moved out, had not been living at the apartment, and did not have a key, was legally allowed to enter the apartment at any time, that is not the relevant question. If a person reasonably believes that someone is unlawfully entering a residence, they can defend their habitation.

Further, a person is not guilty of a crime if "the act ... constituting the crime was induced by a misapprehension of fact which, if true, would have justified the act...." OCGA § 16-3-5. Therefore, if Hayes believed Heron's entry was unlawful, he could use deadly force, if one of the 3 subsections described above applies.

This leads to additional factual questions, did Hayes know who was violently entering the apartment and did Hayes think the entry was unlawful. The facts show that Hayes and Taylor were awakened by a loud bang at the apartment. Hayes knew that Taylor had tried to ascertain who was at the door but was unable to do so. The door was then violently kicked in and what they believed to be an intruder headed right to the bedroom. Then, the intruder began to open the bedroom door. These facts support the conclusion that Hayes (and Taylor) did not know who had broken into the apartment and that Hayes (and Taylor) believed the entry was unlawful. More importantly, there is no evidence to refute this conclusion. At trial, a defendant would not have to establish this; instead, the State would have to disprove it beyond a reasonable doubt. With no evidence to the contrary, the evidence supports that Hayes believed, both subjectively and objectively, that an unknown person was violently and unlawfully entering the apartment and headed to the bedroom occupied by him and Taylor.

Based on the above, Hayes reasonably believed that his use of deadly force was necessary to prevent or terminate the unlawful entry into or attack of the apartment by an intruder unknown to him. Therefore, unless there is evidence

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to prove that all 3 subsections do not apply, then the use of deadly force by Hayes was legally justified. Put another way, if only 1 applies, then there is insufficient evidence to prove that Hayes's actions were not justified.

Clearly, subsection 1 applies. Based on the evidence: the entry was made in a violent and tumultuous manner, Hayes reasonably believed the entry was made for the purpose of assaulting or offering violence to him or Taylor, and Hayes reasonably believed that the use of force was necessary to prevent the assault of violence.

Because the evidence does not disprove that Hayes was justified under the first way someone can legally use deadly force under defense-of-habitation, it is not necessary for me to contemplate the other 2 ways. I do so, however, to thoroughly review the laws that apply to this investigation.

Under subsection 2, a person may use deadly force if "that force is used against another person who is not a member of the family or household and who unlawfully and forcibly enters or has unlawfully and forcibly entered the residence and the person using such force knew or had reason to believe that an unlawful and forcible entry occurred." This subsection allows the use of deadly force based solely on an unlawful and forcible entry and is not dependent on a potential assault, physical violence, or a felony that are required in subsections 1 and 3.

The subsection's lack of punctuation (specifically, the lack of any commas) leads to two different possible interpretations which determine whether deadly force can be used against a family or household member under this subsection. Those potential interpretations are:

- A. Deadly force can be used if that force is used against another person
  - 1. Who is not a member of the family or household and who unlawfully and forcibly enters, or
  - 2. Has unlawfully and forcibly entered the residence and the person using such force knew or had reason to believe that an unlawful and forcible entry occurred.
- B. Deadly force can be used if that force is used against another person who is not a member of the family or household and who
  - 1. Unlawfully and forcibly enters, or
  - 2. Has unlawfully and forcibly entered the residence and the person using such force knew or had reason to believe that an unlawful and forcible entry occurred.

The second interpretation is unnecessarily repetitive and makes the second part of the subsection (after the "or") essentially meaningless. Courts, generally, interpret statutes so that no portion of the statute is meaningless. Therefore, the first interpretation is not only a more logical interpretation, but is also the interpretation based on the principles of statutory interpretation as explained by our appellate courts.

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Hayes had reason to believe that an intruder had unlawfully and forcibly entered the apartment. Therefore, there is not evidence to support a claim that Hayes was unjustified in his actions.

Finally, under subsection 3, deadly force is allowed if the person using force reasonably believes that the entry was made for the purpose of committing a felony and such force is necessary to prevent the commission of the felony. Under Georgia law, burglary is a felony that requires proof of an unlawful entry with the intent to commit a theft of felony therein. Proof of the intent to commit a theft is often shown by someone's unlawful entry into a residence that has items or valuables inside that someone could steal. A thorough review of the investigation does not lead to evidence that can disprove that Hayes reasonably believed that an unknown intruder had broken into the apartment to commit a burglary.

Based on the evidence from CPD's investigation, there is not evidence to disprove that Hayes's actions were justified under all three subsections of Georgia's defense-of-habitation law. Further, pursuant to OCGA § 16-3-23.1, Hayes legally could stand his ground and had no duty to retreat.

**Summary of my conclusion:**

Whether Hayes could have acted in a different manner, including doing something different that would have led to Heron not being shot, is legally irrelevant. Could different decisions, by all parties involved, have led to a less tragic result? Rarely could this question be answered negatively. In hindsight, all those involved could have acted differently. But the question for me as District Attorney is whether there is sufficient evidence, based on the investigation provided to me, to prosecute Hayes for a crime. The law and the evidence are what my conclusion is based on.

This comes down to whether there is evidence to disprove that Hayes subjectively and reasonably objectively believed an unknown intruder had broken into the apartment in which he was an overnight guest. Ultimately, the investigation did not provide such evidence. Instead, the evidence shows that he did believe an unknown intruder had broken into the apartment. Further, the evidence shows that this belief was reasonable. For these reasons, and those explained above, based on the evidence provided to me, there is not sufficient evidence to proceed with prosecution of Hayes for his actions that led to the death of Amaro Heron.

This conclusion in no way minimizes the tragedy of Amaro Heron's death. In my meetings with Heron's family, I made clear that, while there may be those that do not agree with my conclusion, I strive to be transparent in this and any case. To that end, I have provided a copy of the entire case file to Heron's family and indicated that I would

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continue to answer any questions they may have. Further, if additional evidence is provided to my office, I will review it to determine whether it changes any legal determination.

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