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December 29, 2025

Sheriff Chris Wainwright
Oxford County Sheriff's Department
26 Western Ave.
PO Box 179
Paris, Maine 04281

Dear Sheriff Wainwright:

We have completed our investigation and legal review of the incident on March 29, 2025, in Hartford, involving the use of deadly force by Deputies Reece Rodrigue and Derek MacDonald of the Oxford County Sheriff's Department that resulted in the death of 52-year-old Eric Newell.

Factual Summary

On March 29, 2025, at approximately 4:52 pm, Oxford County Sheriff's Department received a 911 call from a male reporting his stepson had assaulted and strangled him. The caller reported being in a barn on the property while his stepson, Eric Newell, was inside the family home, located at 229 Tucker Road in Hartford. The caller reported being afraid of his stepson and advised that more than one law enforcement officer would be needed to meet with Mr. Newell. Oxford County Corporal Joshua Aylward was on duty and observed the call for service on his mobile data terminal for an assault involving Eric Newell. Cpl. Aylward, who was familiar with Mr. Newell, learned Mr. Newell was flagged in the computer system as being assaultive towards law enforcement. Cpl. Aylward requested Deputy MacDonald respond to the call with him. Cpl. Aylward and Deputy MacDonald arrived at the home at the same time. Upon arrival, Cpl. Aylward spoke with the 911 caller and noted what he described as ligature marks on the caller's neck. This prompted Cpl. Aylward to request Deputy Rodrigue and an Androscoggin County Deputy to also respond to the scene. Cpl. Aylward was told Mr. Newell was the only

person in the house which was located adjacent to the barn where Cpl. Aylward met with the caller and his wife.

Cpl. Aylward obtained Mr. Newell's phone number and spoke over the phone with Mr. Newell about the assault involving his stepfather. During the conversation, Mr. Newell told Cpl. Aylward he had access to a gun.¹ Cpl. Aylward asked Mr. Newell to come out of the house where he intended to arrest Mr. Newell for domestic violence assault. They spoke for a period of time about the assault then Mr. Newell suggested the officers come get him and hung up the phone. Cpl. Aylward directed the officers on scene to move away from the house, requested additional units for back up, and called Mr. Newell on the phone again. During that phone call, Mr. Newell made comments about how much pain he was experiencing, indicated he wanted to hurt himself, and reported holding a knife to his own throat. At one point, Mr. Newell started yelling and crying. He told Cpl. Aylward he had the knife, was coming out, and he didn't care if officers shot him. Cpl. Aylward warned the other officers on the scene Mr. Newell was coming out of the residence with a knife. Cpl. Aylward can be heard on his body worn camera repeatedly yelling at Mr. Newell as he came out of the house to put the knife down and to drop the knife.

Deputy MacDonald was aware Cpl. Aylward was negotiating with Mr. Newell and heard Cpl. Aylward yell that Mr. Newell was coming out of the house. At this time, Deputy MacDonald and Androscoggin County Deputy Kurt Fegan were positioned at the right end of the attached garage. This position allowed them to see the front of the house and the porch between the garage and the home. Mr. Newell's truck was parked in front of the garage. Deputy MacDonald observed Mr. Newell come out of the house with a knife in his hand. Both deputies moved toward Mr. Newell who had the knife to his throat telling the deputies to shoot him. Deputy MacDonald, Deputy Fegan and Cpl. Aylward repeatedly yelled at Mr. Newell to drop the knife and then observed Mr. Newell stabbing himself in the chest. Mr. Newell's attention appeared to be focused on Deputies MacDonald and Fegan.

When Mr. Newell exited the home, Deputy Rodrigue was positioned behind a rock in front of the residence which provided him with a view of the front of the house. Once Mr. Newell came off the porch between the house and garage, Deputy Rodrigue could see Mr. Newell on the driveway, holding a knife, and walking towards Deputy Fegan and Deputy MacDonald. Deputy Rodrigue ran in the direction of Mr. Newell, who turned away and started walking back towards the porch. As Mr. Newell approached the porch, Deputy Rodrigue discharged his taser but was unsuccessful in immobilizing Mr. Newell.² After the taser deployment, Mr. Newell turned around toward Deputy Rodrigue, who was now on the driver's side of the truck, and began to advance toward him with the knife still in hand. Deputies

¹ Cpl. Aylward was aware that Mr. Newell had prior involvement with law enforcement which led to a weapon restriction order (See 34-B MRS §3862-A commonly referred to as the yellow flag law) The Court Order allows law enforcement to temporarily remove firearms from individuals deemed a danger to themselves or others.

² During their interviews, the officers at the scene described not wanting Mr. Newell to re-enter the house once he came out because they intended to arrest Mr. Newell for domestic violence assault and wanted to avoid the potential of Mr. Newell barricading himself inside the house.

MacDonald and Fegan then moved towards Mr. Newell with their firearms drawn. Deputy MacDonald, armed with a handgun, fired at Mr. Newell believing he was advancing on Deputy Rodrigue with the knife in his hand. Deputy MacDonald later told investigators he shot because he believed that Mr. Newell intended to use the knife to kill or inflict serious injury on Deputy Rodrigue.

When Mr. Newell turned around after being tased, Deputy Rodrigue told investigators it appeared that Mr. Newell got into a running stance before charging at Deputy Rodrigue. Deputy Rodrigue dropped his taser and grabbed his rifle while backing away from Mr. Newell. Deputy Rodrigue fired his rifle as Mr. Newell was coming towards him with the knife. Deputy Rodrigue later told investigators he believed that Mr. Newell was approximately five feet from him when Mr. Newell was shot. Deputy Rodrigue told investigators he shot Mr. Newell because he believed Mr. Newell was going to kill him and he was afraid for his life. Deputies Rodrigue's and MacDonald's body worn cameras captured the deadly force incident.

Despite life savings efforts, Mr. Newell was declared dead at the scene. A post-mortem examination was conducted by the Medical Examiner's office who concluded Mr. Newell died of multiple gunshot wounds.

Discussion and Legal Analysis

The Office of the Attorney General has exclusive responsibility for the direction and control of any criminal investigation of a law enforcement officer who uses deadly force while acting in the performance of the officer's duties.³ The detectives who conduct these investigations are independent of any other law enforcement agency. The sole purpose of the investigation into this matter was to determine if a criminal prosecution was warranted or if self-defense or the defense of others was reasonably generated by the facts.⁴ Any such prosecution would require the State to disprove self-defense or the defense of others beyond a reasonable doubt. The investigation did not include an analysis of whether any personnel action might be warranted, whether the use of deadly force could have been averted, or whether there might be civil liability. Indeed, state law provides that the fact that conduct may be justifiable under the law does not abolish or impair any other available legal remedy.

Whether the use of force by a law enforcement officer is reasonable is based on the totality of the particular circumstances and judged from the perspective of a reasonable officer on the scene, allowing for the fact that police officers are often forced to make split-second decisions

³ 5 M.R.S. § 200-A

⁴ Under Maine law, for a law enforcement officer to lawfully use deadly force in self-defense or the defense of others, two requirements must be met. First, the officer must reasonably believe that unlawful deadly force is imminently threatened against the officer or another person and, second, the officer must reasonably believe that the use of deadly force is necessary to defend the officer or other person. 17-A M.R.S. § 107(2)(A)

about the amount of force necessary in a given situation. The legal analysis requires careful attention to the facts and circumstances of each case, including the severity of the crime threatened or committed and whether the suspect poses an immediate threat to the safety of others.

Conclusion

When Deputies Rodrigue and MacDonald deployed deadly force against Mr. Newell, it was reasonable for them to believe that Mr. Newell was advancing on Deputy Rodrigue with a knife in his hand to kill or seriously injure Deputy Rodrigue. Mr. Newell refused to obey repeated commands by law enforcement to drop the knife. Deputy Rodrigue attempted to use less than lethal force to take Mr. Newell into custody for domestic violence assault and to prevent him from going back into the home. Deputy MacDonald observed Mr. Newell run in the direction of Deputy Rodrigue with the knife in his hand and fired at Mr. Newell believing he was about to seriously injure or kill Deputy Rodrigue. At the time Mr. Newell ran at Deputy Rodrigue with the knife, it was reasonable for Deputy Rodrigue to believe he needed to use deadly force to protect himself. All the facts and circumstances point to the conclusion that Deputy Rodrigue and Deputy MacDonald acted in self-defense and defense of another when they shot Mr. Newell.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Aaron M. Frey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A" and a long, sweeping underline.

Aaron M. Frey
Attorney General