

**Non-Fatal Officer Involved Shooting of Angel Sanchez
Baldwin Park Police Department**

Detective Eric Camacho, #4415

Detective Jose Castro, #2892

J.S.I.D. File #21-0206



GEORGE GASCÓN

District Attorney

Justice System Integrity Division

February 6, 2023

MEMORANDUM

TO: CHIEF ROBERT A. LÓPEZ
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FROM: JUSTICE SYSTEM INTEGRITY DIVISION
Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office

SUBJECT: Non-Fatal Officer Involved Shooting of Angel Sanchez
J.S.I.D. File #21-0206
B.P.P.D. File #21-04082
L.A.S.D. File #021-00058-3199-055

DATE: February 6, 2023

The Justice System Integrity Division of the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office has completed its review of the May 21, 2021, non-fatal shooting of Angel Sanchez by Baldwin Park Police Department (BPPD) Detectives Eric Camacho and Jose Castro. We have concluded that Detective Camacho used lawful and reasonable force in defense of self and in defense of another, and that there is insufficient evidence to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Detective Castro did not act in lawful self-defense when he used deadly force.

The District Attorney's Command Center was notified of the shooting at approximately 10:15 p.m. on May 21, 2021. The District Attorney Response Team responded to the location. They were given a briefing regarding the circumstances surrounding the shooting and a walk-through of the scene.

The following analysis is based on investigative reports, recorded interviews, firearm analysis reports, DNA analysis, and crime scene photos and diagrams submitted by Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Detectives Robert McGaughey and Scott Lawler. No video of the incident was recovered. Detectives Camacho and Castro gave voluntary statements, which were considered in this analysis.

FACTUAL ANALYSIS

On May 21, 2021, at approximately 9:00 p.m., BPPD Detectives Camacho and Castro were working a gang activity prevention detail and driving an unmarked black Dodge Charger equipped with interior red and blue emergency lights and side-mounted spot lights. Castro was driving and Camacho was seated in the front passenger seat of the car. Both detectives were dressed in their gang enforcement uniforms, which included vests and badges that identified them as police officers. They had received information that there was going to be a “Northside Bolen” gang party in the area.

The detectives spotted a black Chevrolet Tahoe with tinted windows and initiated a traffic stop in the [REDACTED] block of Phelan Avenue in Baldwin Park. The car had three occupants: [REDACTED], the driver, [REDACTED], the front seat passenger, and Sanchez, who was sitting in the rear right seat.¹ When the vehicle yielded, Camacho exited the Charger and approached the passenger side of the Tahoe. As he approached, Sanchez quickly exited the Tahoe from the right rear passenger door.



Fig. 1 – Castro and Camacho’s undercover patrol vehicle parked behind the Chevrolet Tahoe.

Camacho stated that Sanchez exited the Tahoe from the right rear passenger door. According to Camacho, Sanchez was initially facing the Tahoe visibly holding a gun in front of his chest. Camacho said Sanchez then turned his torso toward the left and pointed the gun at Camacho. Sanchez denied pointing the gun at Camacho but conceded that he may have faced the detective

¹ Sanchez is a documented Northside Bolen Parque gang member known by the moniker “Serio.”

while holding the gun for a “split second.” Camacho fired five rounds² at Sanchez using his department-issued duty weapon.³ Sanchez turned and fled north on Phelan Avenue. Castro, who was standing to the left of the Tahoe, heard his partner yell something, followed by the sound of gunshots. He turned and saw Camacho stumbling backwards, then saw a dark figure running northbound from the scene. In an interview, Castro stated that he believed his partner had just been shot or was engaged with an armed suspect who would possibly run around the front of the Tahoe to attack Castro. Castro fired one round in Sanchez’s direction.⁴

After Castro fired, Sanchez made a gesture as if he were falling or throwing an item before collapsing on the ground. Camacho and BPPD Officer Jose Jimenez, who had arrived at the scene after the incident, approached Sanchez. Camacho patted Sanchez down for weapons and did not find any. He applied a tourniquet on Sanchez’s right thigh and informed Jimenez that he believed Sanchez had a weapon somewhere near where he was lying.

The area was searched and a 9mm “ghost gun”⁵ was later recovered from the front yard of a residence on Phelan Avenue facing the spot where Sanchez had collapsed.⁶ The firearm was found approximately 10 feet away from the Tahoe.⁷ No fingerprints were recovered from the gun. Sanchez’s DNA was found on various portions of the ghost gun.

² Camacho believed that he had fired two rounds, and Castro claimed to have fired one round. Six .40 caliber cartridge casings were recovered on the ground near the vehicles. Based on the casings and the rounds remaining in each officer’s duty weapon magazines, the evidence suggests that Camacho fired five rounds and Castro fired one.

³ Investigators took possession of and examined Camacho’s duty weapon, a Sig Sauer model P226 .40 caliber semiautomatic pistol with a mounted tactical Surefire light. They found one round in the chamber and a fully loaded magazine with 15 rounds. They also recovered an additional 15-capacity magazine loaded with 10 live rounds. Camacho explained that he had performed a tactical reload. The firearm was test fired and found to be operational.

⁴ Investigators took possession of and examined Castro’s duty weapon, a Sig Sauer model P226 .40 caliber semiautomatic pistol with a mounted tactical Surefire light. They found one round in the chamber and 14 rounds remaining in the 15-capacity magazine. The firearm was test fired and found to be operational.

⁵ A “ghost gun” is a gun that lacks a serial number by which it can be identified. It is typically assembled by a user from purchased or homemade components.

⁶ A resident at the location where the gun was found confirmed that the weapon did not belong to her. The front gate of the yard was locked prior to the incident.

⁷ The ghost gun contained a magazine loaded with 14 9mm cartridges.



Fig. 2 – Sanchez’s “ghost gun” as found in the front yard of a nearby residence.

Los Angeles County Fire Department personnel responded to the location and treated Sanchez for his injuries. Sanchez sustained two gunshot wounds to the left calf area, one gunshot wound to his left groin, and one gunshot wound to his right thigh. He was transported to LAC+USC Medical Center, where he underwent surgery and was released into custody. Sanchez’s blood tested presumptive positive for amphetamines, benzodiazepines, cannabinoids, and opiates.

No video of the incident was recovered. Camacho and Castro were not equipped with body-worn video, nor was their vehicle equipped with a dash camera. A residence near the location of the incident was equipped with surveillance video, but it was not recording at the time of the incident.

Both Camacho and Castro stated that they knew Sanchez to be a documented and self-admitted gang member and had had several previous interactions with him, including arrests. In one incident, Sanchez had run from Camacho and Castro, seemingly in an attempt to distract attention from his companion, who was armed with a firearm. Both Camacho and Castro stated that they did not recognize Sanchez until after they had fired their weapons.

Statement of [REDACTED]

[REDACTED], the driver of the Tahoe, told detectives she was at a party with [REDACTED] the night of the incident. As they were leaving, [REDACTED] received a call from Sanchez, who asked for a ride to a nearby liquor store. They agreed to drive him there. While they were returning to the party from the liquor store, [REDACTED] stopped at an intersection and saw a black car approaching from the other direction. [REDACTED] saw it and recognized it as a police vehicle. He turned and notified Sanchez, who was seated in the right rear passenger seat.

█████ turned left at the intersection and the police vehicle proceeded through the intersection behind her. She heard █████ and Sanchez say that the police were behind them. The car then activated its lights and █████ began driving slowly to find a place to pull over. As she was pulling over, and before she came to a complete stop, Sanchez exited the vehicle through the right rear passenger door. Sanchez began veering left. She could not see his hands. She heard an officer on the passenger side screaming orders at Sanchez and believed she saw Sanchez run about 12 feet before she heard six gunshots. She was not watching Sanchez as he ran and heard but did not see the shooting. After Sanchez fell, she heard an officer yell something about not touching a gun. She never saw Sanchez or █████ with a firearm.

Statement of █████

█████ was at a residence with his girlfriend, █████, which they left to go to a nearby liquor store. He stated that while he was at the store, an unknown individual whom he had never met before, Sanchez, asked for a ride and they agreed to give him one. Sanchez sat behind █████, who was seated in the front passenger seat. As they were driving back, they got pulled over. █████ knew it was a police vehicle pulling them over because he saw its flashing lights. █████ pulled over and Sanchez jumped out of the car and started running. █████ heard two to three gunshots in rapid succession and saw Sanchez “lay down.” He did not see anything in Sanchez’s hands or pockets at the store or when he ran from the car. █████ stated that he used to be in a Baldwin Park gang and used to go by the moniker █████

Statement of Sanchez

LASD Detectives McGaughey and Lawler interviewed Sanchez at LAC+USC Medical Center after he was out of surgery. They read Sanchez his Miranda rights and he agreed to speak with the investigators. He told the detectives that he had gone to the liquor store with his friend █████ and a woman he did not know, █████. On their way back to the party, they were stopped by police. Sanchez said he recognized the undercover police car because he had been stopped by Castro before. After █████ stopped the car, Sanchez exited the vehicle while holding a gun in his right hand up in front of his chest. He stated he turned to run and lowered the gun pointing the barrel away from his body. He was then shot by the police. Sanchez did not hear any commands until after the shooting. Sanchez could not remember if he had thrown his gun into the front yard on Phelan Avenue before or after he was shot.

Sanchez said he had purchased the gun approximately one week prior because of recent shootings in his neighborhood. He said he did not know why he ran. He said he was being “stupid” and thought he could get away. He admitted that he had faced Camacho “maybe for like a split second” while armed after exiting the vehicle, but stated that he never pointed the handgun at the officers. He said he did not believe that he was shot “for no reason” and believed “they seen the gun . . . and just reacted.” He said he was glad the officers had shot him in the leg and that he was still alive. Asked if there was anything he wanted to relay to the officers, he said, “Good looking out.”

Statement of Camacho

Camacho was interviewed on May 23, 2021, in the presence of his attorney. He stated that on May 21, 2021, he had been working with his partner, Castro, who was driving an undercover black Dodge Charger equipped with lights and sirens. Camacho was in the front passenger seat. Over the prior several weeks, numerous gang-related shootings had occurred in Baldwin Park. Camacho and Castro had heard there would be a large gang party on the [REDACTED] block of Phelan Avenue to commemorate the one-year anniversary of a gang member's murder.

At approximately 9 p.m., they were driving northbound on Phelan Avenue toward Cavette Place when they saw a black Chevrolet Tahoe facing east at the intersection. The car stopped for five to six seconds without turning and had dark tinted windows. Camacho believed that the driver either did not want to turn in front of the police vehicle or the driver was drunk. The car began moving and Camacho illuminated it with a flashlight. He then saw there was a female driver.

The car turned northbound on Phelan Avenue. Camacho used his flashlight to illuminate the car and saw two men wearing hats in the back seat of the Tahoe.⁸ Castro and Camacho conducted a traffic stop and activated the patrol vehicle's rotating lights. Camacho asked dispatch to run the Tahoe's plates. He saw several spots where the Tahoe could have pulled over but it did not, instead driving slowly on Phelan Avenue. Camacho believed the vehicle would stop in front of the residence with the gang party. Instead, it finally yielded approximately two to three houses away from the party and approximately six to seven houses past where the detectives had activated lights and sirens. According to Camacho, the detectives both communicated that they believed the car was acting strangely.

Camacho thought the vehicle was "parked kind of weird" as it had stopped in front of another car alongside the curb, causing the patrol vehicle to have to park offset and leave the passenger side officer exposed. He quickly exited the patrol vehicle, which had parked between seven and 12 feet from the Tahoe. Castro warned Camacho to be careful. Given the car's "odd" driving, Camacho stated that he thought that when the Tahoe finally stopped, it was either going to drive away again, or an occupant would exit and shoot him.

Camacho took a position on the curb of the sidewalk approximately three to four feet from the right rear bumper of the vehicle in order to get visibility of the passenger side of the car. He drew his firearm and held it at the low ready position. The right rear passenger door then popped open. Based on his past experience, Camacho believed that when an individual opens a vehicle door during a traffic stop, he is planning either to run or to fight the officer. Camacho stated that in his 6.5 years of law enforcement experience, there had been 11 occasions during which an occupant had either fled from the vehicle or fought him.

Camacho yelled "stay in the car!" and raised his firearm. He observed a man, Sanchez, exit the vehicle wearing a heavy jacket. When Sanchez exited, he was facing the Tahoe and holding a black and silver handgun close to his chest. At first, the barrel was pointing toward the sky. Sanchez then turned his torso to the left, and as he turned, the barrel of the gun dropped from pointing at the sky toward pointing at Camacho. Camacho said, "Without a doubt, I thought he

⁸ Every other witness interviewed described one man seated in front and one in the back.

was going to shoot me.” Camacho was also afraid that Sanchez would shoot his partner. Camacho’s first reaction was to fire his weapon to stop the threat. Camacho said he raised his firearm from a low ready position, activated the gun-mounted flashlight, and discharged the firearm two to three times. He was standing approximately seven to ten feet from Sanchez and stated there was low visibility during the incident.

Sanchez turned away and ran northbound on Phelan Avenue along the east sidewalk. At that moment, Camacho “backpedaled” to gain a better position in case another occupant of the Tahoe also exited and conducted a tactical reload of his magazine. Sanchez took four to five steps northbound. Camacho could not see if Sanchez was armed because his back was to Camacho, and his heavy jacket obscured the locations of his arms and hands. Camacho heard an additional gunshot but did not know where it came from. Camacho saw Sanchez motion to the right as if he was throwing or falling before falling to the ground. Sanchez raised his hands and turned his body toward Camacho.

Camacho approached Sanchez and patted him down but did not see a firearm in the immediate area. He then recognized Sanchez as someone he had had previously arrested. Camacho asked Sanchez where the firearm was. Sanchez said, “I don’t know, you tell me.” Asked where he had thrown the firearm, Sanchez said, “I don’t know where it’s at.” Camacho searched the immediate area and could not find the firearm. Believing the firearm must be underneath Sanchez, he pulled Sanchez approximately five feet south and flipped him over, but did not see a gun. Camacho searched Sanchez for gunshot wounds and applied a tourniquet to his right leg. Paramedics soon arrived and took over.

Camacho then continued to search for the firearm and found it in the front yard of a residence to the east of where Sanchez had fallen and near where Camacho had seen Sanchez motioning to his right. Camacho recognized the gun as the same one Sanchez had been holding. He stated that he left the weapon alone and told Jimenez to watch the gun and make sure no one touched it.

Statement of Castro

Castro was interviewed on May 23, 2021, in the presence of his attorney. On May 21, he and Camacho were on patrol when they observed a black Tahoe stopped at the intersection of Phelan Avenue and Cavette Place. The detectives illuminated the interior of the car with a spotlight and Castro saw a female driver, a male front seat passenger who appeared to slouch down, and a male rear right seat passenger wearing a hat. After approximately 20 seconds, the Tahoe turned northbound on Phelan Avenue toward the location of a known party involving Northside Bolen gang members.

The detectives activated lights and sirens to stop the car. The car drove north at a very slow speed for approximately 70 to 80 feet without yielding. Castro felt this behavior was unusual and was worried that if the car stopped in front of the party, gang members would come out and interfere with the stop.

The Tahoe yielded to the east side of the street approximately three houses south of the known gang hangout. Castro warned Camacho to “watch out” for the rear right passenger. He then

exited the patrol vehicle and approached the Tahoe on the driver side. Castro was near the left rear passenger door of the Tahoe when he heard Camacho yell something, though he could not recall what Camacho said. He then heard two gunshots.

Castro moved left to create some distance between himself and the Tahoe. He then saw Camacho on the east side of the patrol vehicle stumbling backward at a fast pace while holding a gun out in front of his chest with his arms extended. Camacho appeared to be looking at something on the east side of the Tahoe.

Castro said he had his firearm in his hands but did not recall unholstering his weapon. He believed his partner had just been shot or was still being engaged by an armed suspect on the other side of the Tahoe. Castro saw the silhouette of a person wearing dark clothing run in a northbound direction on the sidewalk for approximately 15 to 20 steps. Although Castro was using his flashlight, it was very dark and he had trouble seeing the man who was running. Castro stated that he believed his partner had possibly been shot, Sanchez was armed, and possibly preparing to run around the front of the Tahoe to attack Castro. He fired one round at Sanchez, who then fell to the ground approximately 10 feet in front of the Tahoe.

Castro heard Camacho yell, "Where's the gun?" at Sanchez. Sanchez was lying on his right side and was ordered to show his hands. Sanchez appeared to recognize Castro from prior contacts and said, "Fool, you shot me." At that point, Castro recognized Sanchez as someone he had had several contacts with in the past. Castro used the radio to advise that shots had been fired. Castro maintained his position until additional patrol units arrived.

DNA Analysis

Investigators collected DNA swabs from multiple portions of the ghost gun, including its trigger/trigger guard, grip, slide/barrel, magazine, and 14 live cartridges. A DNA reference swab was also taken from Sanchez.⁹ The DNA profiles generated by the swabs, when compared to Sanchez's reference sample, provided "very strong support" for the proposition that Sanchez was a contributor to the DNA obtained from the trigger/trigger guard, grip, slide/barrel, and magazine. The sample from the 14 live cartridges contained an insufficient amount of DNA for analysis.

LEGAL ANALYSIS

A peace officer is justified in using deadly force upon another person when the officer reasonably believes, based on the totality of the circumstances, that such force is necessary for either of the following reasons: (1) to defend against an imminent threat of death or serious bodily injury to the officer or to another person; or (2) to apprehend a fleeing person for any felony that threatened or resulted in death or serious bodily injury, if the officer reasonably believes that the person will cause death or serious bodily injury to another unless immediately apprehended. Penal Code §§ 835a(c)(1)(A) & (B).

⁹ It does not appear that reference samples were taken from Castro, Camacho, or other individuals at the scene.

Deadly force shall be used “only when necessary in defense of human life,” and officers “shall use other available resources and techniques if reasonably safe and feasible to an objectively reasonable officer.” Penal Code § 835a(a)(2).

A threat of death or serious bodily injury is imminent when, based on the totality of the circumstances, a reasonable officer in the same situation would believe that a person has the present ability, opportunity, and apparent intent to immediately cause death or serious bodily injury to the peace officer or another person. An imminent harm is not merely a fear of future harm, no matter how great the fear and no matter how great the likelihood of the harm, but is one that, from appearances, must be instantly confronted and addressed. Penal Code § 835a(e)(2).

When considering the totality of the circumstances, all facts known to or perceived by the peace officer at the time, including the conduct of the officer and the subject leading up to the use of deadly force, are taken into consideration. Penal Code §§ 835a(a)(4) & (e)(3). The peace officer’s decision to use force is not evaluated with the benefit of hindsight and shall account for occasions when officers may be forced to make quick judgments about using force. Penal Code § 835a(a)(4). Moreover, “[a] peace officer who makes or attempts to make an arrest need not retreat, or desist from their efforts by reason of the resistance or threatened resistance of the person being arrested.” Penal Code § 835a(d).

The evidence examined in this investigation shows that Camacho and Castro were on patrol assigned to a gang activity prevention detail in the vicinity of a known gang hangout where they believed a party would be taking place. While approximately one block away from the party, they spotted a car they believed was acting oddly by waiting an unusually long time at an intersection. The car turned and they initiated a stop. Both believed the car continued to act oddly by driving very slowly toward the house with the party before eventually pulling over.

Camacho and Castro both quickly exited their vehicle. As Camacho moved onto the curb, he saw Sanchez jump out of the rear right passenger seat. Camacho stated that he saw Sanchez holding a gun in front of his chest. According to Camacho, the barrel of the gun was initially pointing up toward the sky, but as Sanchez turned his torso to his left and toward Camacho, he dropped the gun toward his chest. Camacho stated that Sanchez pointed the gun at him, prompting Camacho to fire five rounds. Sanchez contested that he had pointed the gun at Camacho, but admitted that he was holding it and that he could have temporarily faced Camacho while doing so. Accordingly, the evidence suggests that Camacho reasonably believed that the use of deadly force was necessary to defend against an imminent threat of death.

There is no evidence to suggest that Castro had actually seen Sanchez armed with a firearm at the time that he fired one round at him. However, Castro had heard his partner yell, followed quickly by the sound of two gunshots. Castro was not certain who had fired, and with limited visibility, he saw Camacho stumbling backwards after the gunshots. Castro stated that he believed his partner had been possibly shot at or was continuing to engage with an armed suspect. Castro saw Sanchez running northbound on Phelan Avenue in the direction of a known gang hangout and stated that he believed Sanchez might turn and wrap around the front of the Tahoe to attack Castro. An officer’s use of deadly force must be judged based on the totality of the circumstances rather than with the benefit of hindsight. Penal Code § 835a(a)(4). In light of

the tense, uncertain, and rapidly evolving circumstances, there is insufficient evidence to conclude that Castro's belief that the use of deadly force was necessary to defend against an imminent threat of death was objectively unreasonable.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, we find that Camacho used lawful and reasonable force in defense of self and in defense of another. We also find that there is insufficient evidence to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Castro did not act in lawful self-defense when he used deadly force.