

Fatal Officer Involved Shooting of James Reja

United States Marshals Service

United States Marshals Service Senior Inspector Ladariuss Strong

Homeland Security Investigations Homeland Security

Investigations Special Agent Rene Bardales

J.S.I.D. File #23-0387



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January 7, 2026

MEMORANDUM

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FROM: JUSTICE SYSTEM INTEGRITY DIVISION
Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office

SUBJECT: Fatal Officer Involved Shooting of James Reja
J.S.I.D. File #23-0387
L.A.P.D. File #2307-17098

DATE: January 7, 2026

The Justice System Integrity Division of the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office has completed its review of the November 13, 2023, fatal shooting of James Reja by Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Special Agent Rene Bardales and United States Marshals Service (USMS) Senior Inspector Ladariuss Strong. We have determined the evidence supports a reasonable belief by Special Agent Bardales and Senior Inspector Strong that the use of deadly force was necessary in lawful self-defense and the defense of others when they fired their service weapons.

The District Attorney's Command Center was notified of the shooting at approximately 2:03 p.m. on November 13, 2023. The District Attorney Response Team responded and was given a briefing and walk-through of the scene by Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) Robbery Homicide Division Detective Greg Stearns.

The following analysis is based on investigative reports and other materials, including surveillance videos, photographs, the autopsy report, and recorded interviews of witnesses submitted by LAPD Robbery Homicide Division on June 12, 2024. Bardales and Strong gave voluntary statements, which were considered in this analysis.¹

¹ These agents were not equipped with body worn video cameras at the time of the incident.

FACTUAL ANALYSIS

On November 13, 2023, a joint task force including Bardales, Strong, and USMS Senior Inspector Dylan Frankenheimer worked together to locate and arrest James Reja based on a [REDACTED]. The task force received information Reja would be picking up medication from a pharmacy inside a medical building located at [REDACTED] Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles.

Before the arrest operation, the task force conducted a briefing where Bardales provided information about Reja's paranoia, previous attempts to take Reja into custody, and Reja's access to weapons.

After the briefing, the task force took positions near the medical building. Bardales, who was in plain clothing, went inside the medical building to conduct surveillance from inside the surveillance video camera room.² All other agents remained outside of the building.

Surveillance videos from inside and outside the building captured the incident.³ At approximately 11:20 a.m., Reja enters the pharmacy and purchases his medication. About ten minutes later, Reja exits the pharmacy, then exits the medical building. While positioned outside of the building, Strong and Frankenheimer run toward Reja. Frankenheimer points his service weapon at Reja, while Strong holds K-9 Joker Bass.⁴ Both identify themselves as police officers and order Reja not to move. Reja looks in Strong and Frankenheimer's direction, drops his sunglasses and bag, grabs the right side of his waistband, and runs back inside using the front entrance of the medical building.

Bardales, whose plan was to watch Reja walk out of the building, came out of the surveillance video camera room, and ran towards the lobby. Bardales saw Reja inside of the building in the lobby area. Reja drew a handgun as Bardales approached him. Bardales lunged towards Reja but Reja escaped Bardales' grasp and fell backward. While on the floor, Reja pointed his handgun at Bardales. Bardales backed up to the wall while unholstering his service weapon.

² The surveillance video camera room is located very close to the pharmacy inside the medical building.

³ The surveillance videos do not have audio.

⁴ K-9 is a phonetic abbreviation of "canine." K-9 Joker Bass is a police dog.



Figure 1-Surveillance Video Depicting Reja Pointing His Handgun in Bardales’s Direction.

As this was occurring, Frankenheimer opened the entry door to the building. K-9 Bass entered through the door and ran toward Bardales. Reja put his handgun to the left side of his head and fired, shooting himself in the head. At the same time, K-9 Bass bit and latched onto Bardales’s left arm.⁵ Within approximately one second of Reja firing, Bardales fired two rounds at Reja. Simultaneously, Strong also fired four rounds at Reja from his position at the entry door.

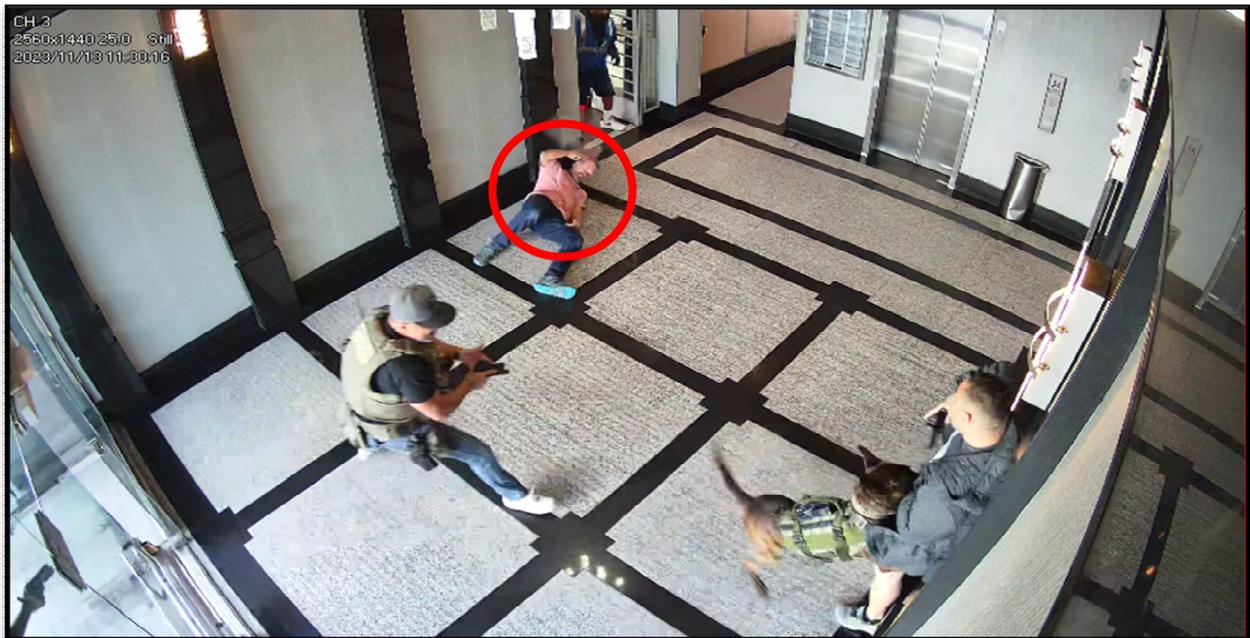


Figure 2-Surveillance Video Depicting Reja Pointing His Handgun to His Head and Firing While K-9 Bass Bit Bardales.

⁵ It appeared K-9 Bass thought Bardales was the fugitive.

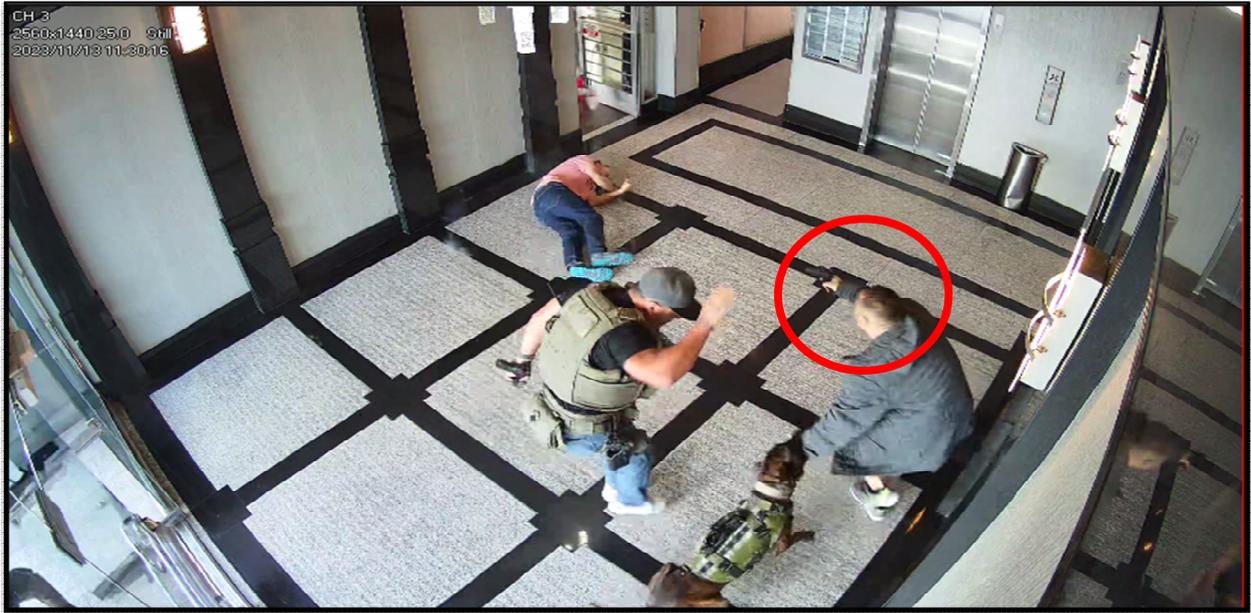


Figure 3-Surveillance Video Depicting Bardales Shooting Reja.

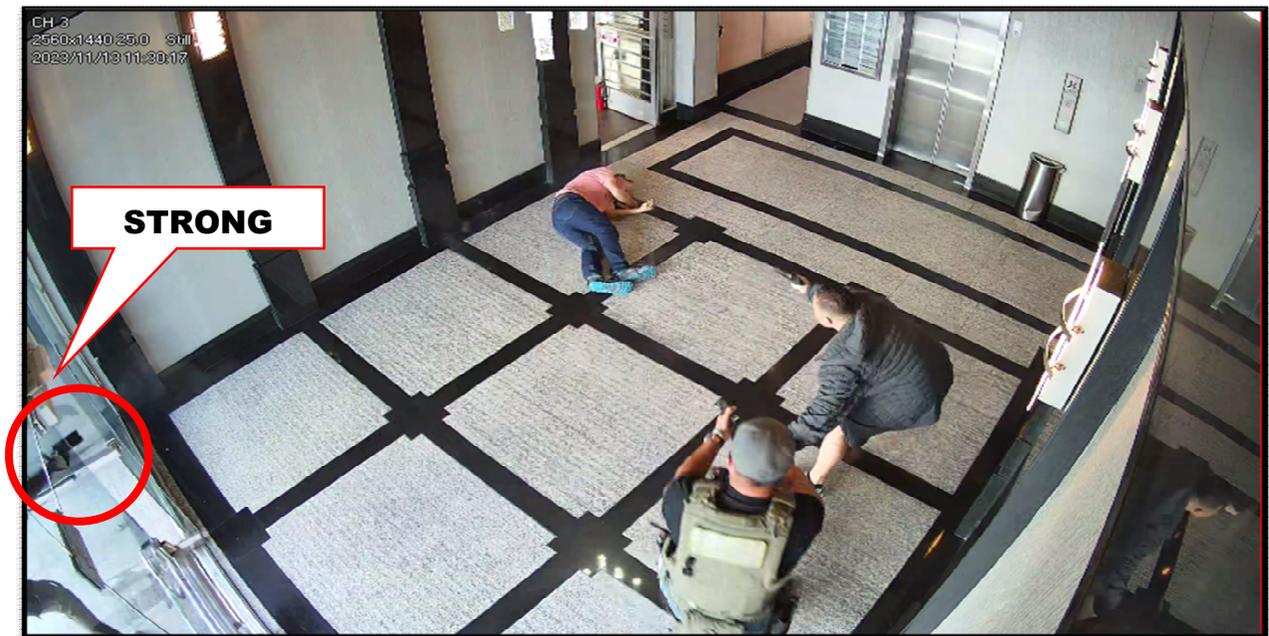


Figure 4-Surveillance Video Depicting Strong Shooting Reja From the Entryway of the Medical Building.

Several task force agents entered the lobby. One agent kicked the handgun away from Reja and assisted another in handcuffing Reja. The agents provided aid to Reja until the paramedics arrived and pronounced death at 11:48 a.m.

Firearms Evidence

Reja was armed with a loaded .357 caliber semi-automatic pistol. A discharged cartridge casing was found on the ground by the elevator, consistent with Reja firing one time.



Figure 5-Photograph of Reja's .357 Caliber Semi-Automatic Pistol.

Bardales was armed with a Sig Sauer Model 320 9mm semi-automatic service weapon. Bardales informed detectives his firearm was loaded to capacity with one round in the chamber and 17 rounds in the magazine. A criminalist examined Bardales's service weapon after the incident and determined it was loaded with one round in the chamber and 15 rounds in the magazine. Two discharged cartridge casings were located at scene, consistent with Bardales firing two rounds at Reja.

Strong was armed with a Glock Model 17M 9mm semi-automatic service weapon. Strong informed detectives his service weapon was loaded with one round in the chamber and 16 rounds in the magazine. One of the detectives examined Strong's service weapon after the incident and determined it was loaded with one round in the chamber and 12 rounds in the magazine. Four discharged cartridge casings and two recovered bullets were located at scene, consistent with Strong firing four rounds at Reja.

Autopsy

On November 15, 2023, an autopsy was conducted. The medical examiner determined the cause of death was a gunshot wound to the head and the manner of death was a suicide. Reja also suffered two other gunshot wounds, including one gunshot wound graze to the left buttock and one gunshot wound graze to the left knee.

Statement of Special Agent Bardales

Bardales provided a voluntary statement to investigators. Bardales told investigators he was aware federal agents had attempted to arrest Reja in Los Angeles in April 2023 and June 2023, but Reja successfully escaped both attempts. Bardales also knew Reja had a gun registered to an alias name in 1998. Bardales knew Reja was paranoid.

Bardales told investigators on the morning of the incident, he was in the surveillance video camera room of the medical building and observed Reja in the pharmacy. He relayed this information to the joint task force members. A short time later, Reja left the pharmacy. Bardales did not know what actions the team took after Reja left the pharmacy. He exited the surveillance video camera room and saw Reja re-enter the building. Reja then reached toward his waistband. Bardales saw a gun, yelled “Gun! Gun! Gun!” and tried to grab Reja in a bear hug. Reja escaped his grasp and fell backwards. He saw Reja pointing a weapon at him, so he started backing up. He was in fear for his life. He pulled his service weapon and fired one time as he observed Reja’s gun pointed at him. Almost immediately after, Reja put the gun to his head, fired, and slumped over.

Statement of Senior Inspector Strong

Strong provided a voluntary statement to investigators. Strong was in uniform working as the handler for K-9 Bass. During their briefing, Bardales went over Reja’s background, criminal history, current charges, and information about previous encounters with Reja. Strong was informed the encounters included Reja escaping twice, including an incident where Reja used force to get away from agents. He was also told Reja was paranoid.

Strong was positioned outside of the medical building with Frankenheimer. Once Reja came out of the medical building, they started yelling, “Police! Police!” and, “Don’t run!” Reja made eye contact with them. When it appeared as though Reja was going to run, Strong released K-9 Bass. He saw Reja run back inside the building. As Reja was running, Strong saw Reja “messaging” with his shirt as if to grab something. He saw K-9 Bass going towards the door and lost track of K-9 Bass afterward because he was focused on finding Reja. Strong stated there was something about the motion of Reja grabbing his shirt that “heightened me up a little more.” Once Strong crossed the threshold into the building, he saw Reja on the ground “messaging” with a gun.⁶ Strong drew his service weapon believing Reja was going to cause harm and shoot at them. Once Strong saw Reja’s gun moving in an upwards direction towards the front door, he fired two to three rounds at Reja.⁷ He stopped firing once there was no movement from Reja and the threat was over.

⁶ Strong saw Reja “messaging” with a black gun by Reja’s right side waist to shoulder area. Strong stated Reja’s gun was out and Reja was pulling the gun, but he could not tell whether Reja was cocking it or what Reja was doing with the gun. Strong started drawing his service weapon and saw Reja’s gun “moving.”

⁷ Strong described seeing the slide of Reja’s gun in a “center, like towards me, up kind of direction.” Strong clarified when he first saw Reja, Reja’s gun was lowered between Reja’s waist and shoulder and then moved up toward the front door. When he saw Reja’s gun move up toward the front door, he fired his service weapon two to three times in succession. Later in his interview, he corrected his statement, saying he was outside of the building when he fired.

Statement of Senior Inspector Dylan Frankenheimer

Frankenheimer told investigators Reja was increasingly paranoid and under pressure due to his properties being seized and prior attempts to arrest him.

Once Frankenheimer learned Reja was walking out of the pharmacy, Frankenheimer, Strong, and K-9 Bass approached Reja. They identified themselves as police officers and told Reja to get on the ground. Frankenheimer had his service weapon unholstered. Reja ran back to the lobby. K-9 Bass lost footing and slid into the corner of the building and glass wall outside. Frankenheimer opened the entry door and saw K-9 Bass “locked” onto Bardales.⁸ Frankenheimer believed K-9 Bass thought Bardales was the fugitive. Frankenheimer started to give K-9 Bass a command when he heard what sounded like multiple gunshots. He was concerned K-9 Bass might still be focused on Bardales. He heard another gunshot. He looked over and saw Reja on the ground with a pool of blood around him. He briefly looked down on the ground and saw what appeared to be a gun. He then returned his attention to K-9 Bass and Bardales.

LEGAL ANALYSIS

A peace officer is justified in using deadly force 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 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 section 835a(c)(1)(A) &(B).

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 section 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 section 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 section 835a(a)(4) and (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 section 835a(a)(4).

⁸ K-9 Bass was biting Bardales.

In this case, agents created a plan to arrest Reja for a federal warrant. The agents, including Bardales and Strong, knew about prior attempts to arrest Reja, Reja's paranoia, and Reja's access to weapons. When Reja was given lawful orders by agents who identified themselves as police, Reja did not comply. Instead, he ran back into an occupied building while drawing a loaded firearm. Bardales stated he feared for his life when he saw Reja point the gun at him. In response, Bardales backed up and fired his service weapon. Strong, also perceiving Reja as a threat, also fired his service weapon.

Both Bardales and Strong were in fear when they observed Reja raising and pointing the gun in their directions. As both Bardales and Strong were in the process of firing at Reja, Reja put his gun to his head and shot himself.

Although the surveillance video depicts both agents firing their weapons approximately one second after Reja fired his weapon, their statements make it clear they did not perceive his actions until after they fired their weapons. The chaotic circumstances likely contributed to any reactionary gap the agents experienced.

Under these circumstances, it was reasonable for the agents to believe Reja had the present ability, opportunity, and intent to cause immediate death or serious bodily injury to them. Accordingly, based on the available evidence, both agents were reasonable in believing the use of deadly force was necessary to stop an imminent deadly threat. Additionally, the agents' use of force was not the cause of Reja's death, since the self-inflicted wound preceded any injury caused by the agents and was immediately fatal.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, we find Special Agent Bardales and Senior Inspector Strong acted lawfully when they used deadly force against Reja.