

Fatal Officer Involved Shooting of William Crawford

Los Angeles Police Department

**Officer Jaime Luna, #34651
Officer Bradley Nielson, #36445**

J.S.I.D. File #19-0177



GEORGE GASCÓN

District Attorney

Justice System Integrity Division

March 24, 2022

MEMORANDUM

TO: CAPTAIN RICH GABALDON
Los Angeles Police Department
Force Investigation Division
100 West First Street, Suite 431
Los Angeles, California 90012

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

SUBJECT: Fatal Officer Involved Shooting of William Crawford
J.S.I.D. File #19-0177
F.I.D. File #F013-19

DATE: March 24, 2022

The Justice System Integrity Division of the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office has completed its review of the April 14, 2019, fatal shooting of William Crawford by Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) Officers Jaime Luna and Bradley Nielson. We have determined that Officer Luna and Officer Nielson acted in lawful self-defense and defense of each other when they used deadly force against Crawford.

The District Attorney's Command Center was notified of this shooting on April 14, 2019, at approximately 2:50 p.m. The District Attorney Response Team responded to the scene and was given a briefing and walk-through by Lieutenant Jeff Wenninger.

The following analysis is based on reports and other materials, including surveillance camera recordings, photographs, and interviews of witnesses submitted by the LAPD Force Investigation Division. The compelled statements of Officer Luna and Officer Nielson were not considered in this analysis.

FACTUAL ANALYSIS

On March 9, 2019, Alexis C., Crawford's ex-girlfriend, reported to police that Crawford entered her apartment in North Hollywood without permission and pointed a gun to her head. Crawford told her, "Someone is going to die here. It's either you or I'm committing suicide." Alexis C. covered her head and fell to the ground. Crawford then put the gun to her head and asked her to provide a reason as to why she ended their relationship. Alexis C. described the gun as black in color with holes in the barrel. She stated that the gun felt cold and heavy as if it was made of metal.¹ After a struggle, Alexis C. fled from her apartment and called the police.

¹ The police report described it as a "black compact firearm."

On March 27, 2019, a no-bail warrant for postrelease community supervision revocation was issued for Crawford's arrest pursuant to Penal Code section 3455(b)(1).

On April 5, 2019, Alexis C. reported to police that Crawford began sending her several text messages, including a picture of a shotgun with extra rounds attached to it. The police report indicated, "Crawford stated several times on the messages that he would not go back to prison and would cause PD to chase him and, 'Go down Kurt Cobain style.'"²

On April 8, 2019, Crawford's close family member reported to the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) that Crawford threatened to kill her. The family member stated she was in fear for her life, and a criminal threats police report was generated. She also stated that another close family member had told her that Crawford had made statements regarding committing "suicide by cop."³

On April 9, 2019, police responded to a carjacking call at a storage unit in North Hollywood. Rafael B. reported that Crawford walked into his storage unit and pointed a black sawed-off pump action shotgun at his face from approximately one foot. Crawford racked the pump action and stated, "Back the fuck up! Give me your keys, cell phone, and money!" Rafael B. asked Crawford if he was kidding. Crawford replied, "I'm on a suicide run. I have nothing to lose." Crawford took Rafael B.'s property, locked him inside the storage unit, and drove Rafael B.'s truck out of the storage facility.

On the same day, officers from LAPD's North Hollywood Area coordinated with LAPD's Metropolitan Division Crime Impact Team (CIT) to locate and arrest Crawford. LAPD Sergeant Yzaguirre from CIT and a special taskforce of approximately ten officers, including Luna, actively searched for Crawford in Hollywood. The taskforce was instructed that Crawford was armed with a sawed-off shotgun and given information about the above referenced incidents.

On April 14, 2019, Luna and Nielson, Metropolitan Division officers, were uniformed and working an overtime detail at Transit Services Division (TSD). Luna and Nielson were not equipped with body-worn video (BWV) cameras because officers assigned to TSD details were not issued BWV. The officers were assigned to a fixed post at the 7th Street and Metro Station located at West 7th Street and Hope Street.

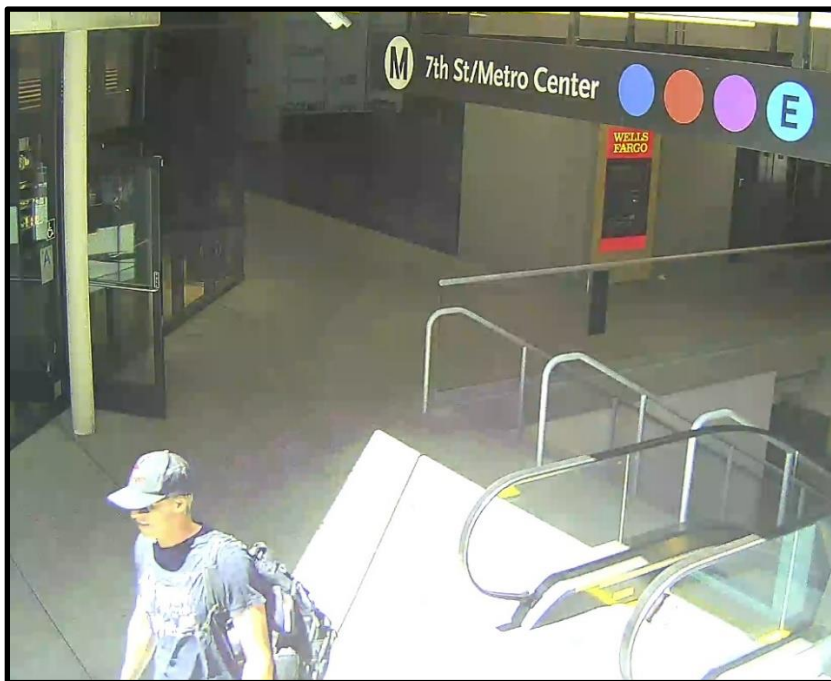
In the early afternoon, LAPD Sergeant Yzaguirre became aware that Crawford was possibly in the area of West 7th Street and Flower Street. At approximately 1:53 p.m., Yzaguirre telephoned Luna and advised him of the same information in consideration for their safety. Yzaguirre also sent Luna a photograph of Crawford.

Investigators obtained surveillance videos from "The BLOCK" shopping area located at 700 South Flower Street and from the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA). At approximately 2:10 p.m., Crawford walked through "The BLOCK" into the "7th St/Metro Center" transit area.

² "PD" is likely a reference to the police. In April 1994, Kurt Cobain, the frontman of the rock band Nirvana, was found dead at his home in Seattle. Cobain allegedly died from a self-inflicted shotgun wound to the head.

³ The report used the phrase "suicide by cop" without the use of quotation marks so it is unclear if these were the victim's exact words or the characterization used by the officer writing the report.

Crawford attempted to scan his Transit Access Pass (TAP) card at a turnstile, however the doors did not open, and Crawford walked toward the TAP kiosks. At approximate 2:12 p.m., Luna and Nielson walked into the transit area. Crawford appeared to glance in the direction of the officers and shortly thereafter walked toward the escalator leading back up to the shopping area. Luna and Nielson followed Crawford up the escalator to the shopping area.



Crawford walked up the escalator to the ground level from the transit area carrying a backpack over his shoulder.

“The BLOCK” video surveillance depicted Crawford, Nielson, and Luna as they walked up the escalator to the ground level and then walked up additional steps to the street level on the south sidewalk of 7th Street. Then, Crawford rapidly walked east on 7th Street toward Hope Street. Surveillance video depicted Luna and Nielson follow Crawford and then begin to run after Crawford.

Investigators also obtained surveillance recordings from the Sheraton Hotel located on Hope Street pointing in an easterly direction that captured part of the foot pursuit on Hope Street and Nielson’s position at the time of the officer involved shooting; however, concrete pillars blocked any other views of the shooting.

On April 18, 2019, Sade W. was identified as a potential witness and interviewed. Sade W. told investigators that she was at the southwest corner of 7th Street and Hope Street when she saw and heard officers running after a tall white man, later identified as Crawford, and stating, “You are going to get shot!” Crawford, who was wearing a backpack on his back, “ran and barricade himself in that corner by Rite Aid, and the officers still had their guns out.” Crawford, “without hesitation, wasn’t stopping moving. . . He unzipped his backpack and pulled out an automatic – in my mind, it was a [expletive] rifle.” Sade W. continued to describe the gun, “I don’t know guns. . . It was all black. It was bigger than the guns the officer [sic] had. And he had the

weirdest [expletive] look on his face like a smile.” Sade W. stated that Crawford, without hesitation, cocked and shot his firearm “at the police,” at which time the officers fired back. Sade W. ran away in fear of being shot and heard more gunshots.

Luna fired seven .45 caliber rounds from his service weapon, and Nielson fired seven 9mm rounds from his service weapon.⁴ Crawford did not shoot the shotgun he removed from his backpack.

Body-worn video (BWV) of several officers captured responding officers approach Crawford as he remained unresponsive and slumped against the corner wall of the Rite Aid alcove. BWV captured an officer removing Crawford’s shotgun as it lay near his left hand prior to handcuffing him. BWV also captured the condition of the shotgun as it was rendered safe at the scene. A rescue ambulance responded and rendered emergency medical aid to Crawford, who was soon thereafter pronounced dead at the scene.

Crawford was armed with a short double barrel, break-open, 12-gauge shotgun. The shotgun was opened by Officer Heisterman at the scene and two live 12-gauge shotshells were loaded inside the shotgun, one in each barrel. A buttshell carrier, containing five live 12-gauge shotshells was wrapped in black tape on top of the barrels.⁵ Heisterman removed one of his plastic gloves and placed it between the barrel and the receiver of the shotgun. The shotgun was later examined in the laboratory and determined to be functional. DNA analysis confirmed that DNA swabs from the shotgun and the shot shells were consistent with the DNA profile obtained from Crawford.



Crawford’s shotgun was photographed after it was rendered safe.

⁴ The number of rounds the officers fired are based on physical examinations of the officers’ service weapons and the expended cartridge casings at the scene.

⁵ Twelve additional live 12-gauge shotshells were also retrieved from Crawford’s backpack.

On April 19, 2019, an autopsy was conducted, and the medical examiner determined that Crawford died as a result of multiple gunshot wounds. Toxicological analysis of Crawford's blood detected the presence of methamphetamine.

LEGAL ANALYSIS

California law permits any person to use deadly force in self-defense or in the defense of others if he actually and reasonably believed that he or others were in imminent danger of great bodily injury or death. CALCRIM No. 505. In protecting himself or another, a person may use that amount of force which he believes reasonably necessary and which would appear to a reasonable person, in the same or similar circumstances, to be necessary to prevent imminent injury. *Id.*

In California, the evaluation of the reasonableness of a police officer's use of deadly force employs a reasonable person acting as a police officer standard, which enables the jury to evaluate the conduct of a reasonable person functioning as a police officer in a stressful situation. *People v. Mehserle* (2012) 206 Cal.App.4th 1125, 1146.

In evaluating whether a police officer's use of deadly force was reasonable in a specific situation, it is helpful to draw guidance from the objective standard of reasonableness adopted in civil actions alleging Fourth Amendment violations. "The 'reasonableness' of a particular use of force must be judged from the perspective of a reasonable officer on the scene, rather than with the 20/20 vision of hindsight... The calculus of reasonableness must embody allowance for the fact that police officers are often forced to make split-second judgments—in circumstances that are tense, uncertain, and rapidly evolving—about the amount of force that is necessary in a particular situation." *Graham v. Connor* (1989) 490 U.S. 386, 396-397.

Over a month prior to the officer involved shooting, Crawford entered his ex-girlfriend's apartment without permission and threatened to kill her. Six days prior to the officer involved shooting, Crawford threatened to kill a close family member. In the documented incidents leading up to the officer involved shooting, including the robbery at the storage facility, Crawford also referenced killing himself and dying at the hands of police officers. The available evidence also indicates that Crawford was armed with the same shotgun during the officer involved shooting that he used to threaten his girlfriend and to commit the robbery. A trail of police reports generated by separate persons indicated that Crawford was armed and dangerous.

Shortly before the officer involved shooting, Yzaguirre notified Luna of Crawford's location downtown. Several days earlier, Luna had already been made aware that Crawford was armed and dangerous when he and others from the taskforce searched for Crawford in Hollywood. A reasonable inference is that when Yzaguirre contacted Luna regarding Crawford's location, Luna relayed the same information to Nielson. The video evidence indicated that the officers identified Crawford in the transit area. The officers followed Crawford to the street level and chased him eastbound on Hope Street and southbound on 7th Street.

Sade W. stated that the officers yelled commands, but Crawford continued to run and positioned himself in the alcove outside the Rite Aid. Sade W. saw Crawford remove a firearm from his backpack, point it at the officers, and shoot. The physical evidence indicated that Crawford did

not fire his weapon, but his firearm was loaded and operable. At the time, his actions posed an imminent and deadly threat to the officers and there was no indication that he intended to surrender. Luna and Nielson fired their service weapons in direct response to Crawford's actions and they stopped the actual threat he posed.

CONCLUSION

We conclude that Officer Luna and Officer Nielson's use of deadly force was legally justified in self-defense and the defense of each other.