

**Fatal Officer Involved Shooting of  
Catherine Susan Gomez  
Long Beach Police Department  
Officer Pongkhamarack Chau, #11135**

**J.S.I.D. File #20-0102**



**GEORGE GASCÓN**

**District Attorney**

**Justice System Integrity Division**

**May 3, 2024**

## MEMORANDUM

TO: CHIEF WALLY HEBEISH  
Long Beach Police Department  
400 West Broadway Boulevard  
Long Beach, California 90802

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

SUBJECT: Fatal Officer Involved Shooting of Catherine Susan Gomez  
J.S.I.D. File #20-0102  
Long Beach P.D. File #20-003

DATE: May 3, 2024

The Justice System Integrity Division (JSID) of the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office has completed its review of the March 15, 2020, fatal shooting of Catherine Susan Gomez by Long Beach Police Department Officer Pongkhamarack Chau. We have concluded that the shooting was not unlawful.

The District Attorney's Command Center was notified at 12:50 a.m. March 16, 2020, of the shooting. The District Attorney's Response Team responded and was briefed at the scene by Long Beach Police Department Lieutenant Lee DeBrabander.

The following analyses are based upon investigative reports; drawings and maps; recordings of interviews of civilian witnesses; communications by Long Beach Police Department dispatchers; recordings of 9-1-1 calls; photographs taken by investigators; and the autopsy report of the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner – Coroner, submitted to the office by the Long Beach Police Department on December 10, 2020.

No compelled statements were reviewed in conducting these analyses. There was no body worn camera recordings submitted or reviewed.

### FACTUAL ANALYSIS

At 10:21 p.m. Long Beach Police Department Officer Pongkhamarack Chau was dispatched to a location on Molino Avenue in the city of Long Beach regarding a family disturbance. Officer Chau had previously been at that location, along with other Long Beach police officers at about 9:45 p.m. During that previous call, [REDACTED] reported to Officer Chau that Catherine Susan Gomez, [REDACTED], was bipolar and had a history of mental illness.

Ms. Gomez had thrown a candle at [REDACTED], burning her. Both had engaged in mutual combat. The officers left after Ms. Gomez agreed to go to her room and stay there until the next morning.

The 10:21 p.m. dispatch advised officers that Ms. Gomez had a knife, was threatening to stab [REDACTED] and that the 9-1-1 call was terminated abruptly.

The 9-1-1 call had been placed by [REDACTED]. She later told Long Beach Police Department homicide detectives that when Ms. Gomez heard the police sirens she shouted, "You fucking bitch, you did call the cops." Ms. Gomez was holding a box cutter with its blade out and started stabbing [REDACTED] in the stomach with it. [REDACTED] believed she was stabbed approximately 15 times.

The following account is from the statements of [REDACTED] and the civilian eyewitnesses to the shooting and the events which immediately preceded it.

Officer Chau was the first to arrive at the address at approximately 10:23 p.m. Officer Chau tried to enter [REDACTED]'s apartment through the front door, but the door was locked. [REDACTED] was inside on the floor holding onto Ms. Gomez's hands, trying to stop Ms. Gomez from stabbing her. [REDACTED] shouted to Officer Chau that he would have to break the window.

Officer Chau tried to break the window with his elbow but was unsuccessful. A neighbor brought a baseball bat from his apartment and, at Officer Chau's direction, broke the window into the apartment. Officer Chau entered through the window.

[REDACTED] was on her knees with Ms. Gomez standing over her on the couch with the box cutter. [REDACTED] was holding onto Ms. Gomez's arms and fell to her left. Officer Chau shouted, "Stop! Get down!"

Officer Chau then shot Ms. Gomez. She immediately fell to the floor. [REDACTED] crawled away from her, and Officer Chau started CPR. CPR was not effective, and Ms. Gomez died at the scene.

An autopsy on Ms. Gomez was performed by the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner-Coroner. The conducting Deputy Medical Examiner reported that the cause of Ms. Gomez's death was two bullet wounds which followed similar trajectories. Each had entered Ms. Gomez's right side and traveled upward and exited at her left breast. The manner of death was determined by the Deputy Medical Examiner to be homicide.

A toxicology screen was performed of blood taken from Ms. Gomez's femoral artery and heart. No illegal substances were detected. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Although [REDACTED] thought she had been repeatedly stabbed by Ms. Gomez, the blade of the box cutter was not locked in position so [REDACTED] suffered no substantial physical injuries.

## **LEGAL ANALYSIS**

California law provides the use of deadly force by a peace officer in the lawful performance of their duties is not unlawful when the officer reasonably believes, based on the totality of the circumstances, that such force is necessary to defend against an imminent threat of death or serious bodily injury to the officer or to another person. (Penal Code sections 196 and 835a(c)(1)(A) and 197).

[REDACTED] was in danger of imminent death or great bodily injury. Ms. Gomez had a box cutter and was striking [REDACTED] with it. Ms. Gomez was close enough to inflict potentially lethal wounds almost instantly.

Instructions by Officer Chau that Ms. Gomez stop and get down were not heeded. Instead, Ms. Gomez persisted in her attack on [REDACTED].

Because of Ms. Gomez's location and her close proximity to [REDACTED], had a less lethal option been unsuccessful in incapacitating Ms. Gomez, she could have fatally injured [REDACTED].

Although it was later discovered that the blade of the box cutter had been retracting with each blow, Officer Chau had no way of knowing this. Even had he known this, he had no way of knowing whether the blade would remain unlocked for the next blow.

Under these circumstances, a belief that deadly force was necessary to protect the life of [REDACTED] was reasonable.

## **CONCLUSION**

The direct and the circumstantial evidence here and the inferences which can be drawn from that evidence establish that the homicide of Ms. Gomez was not unlawful.