

**Fatal Officer Involved Shooting of Christian Sotelo**

**Los Angeles Sheriff's Department**

**Deputy Ryan Goff #632445**

**J.S.I.D. File #20-0440**



**GEORGE GASCÓN**

**District Attorney**

**Justice System Integrity Division**

**September 21, 2021**

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: CAPTAIN JOE MENDOZA  
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Homicide Bureau  
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Monterey Park, California 91755

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

SUBJECT: Fatal Officer Involved Shooting of Christian Sotelo  
J.S.I.D. File #20-0440  
L.A.S.D. File #020-07652-2932-013

DATE: September 21, 2021

The Justice System Integrity Division of the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office has completed its review of the December 6, 2020, fatal shooting of Christian Sotelo by Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) Deputy Ryan Goff. We have concluded that the deputy acted lawfully in self-defense and defense of others.

The District Attorney's Command Center was notified of the shooting at approximately 1:21 a.m., on December 7, 2020. The District Attorney Response Team (DART) responded to the location, and was given a briefing regarding the circumstances surrounding the shooting and a walk-through of the scene.

The following analysis is based on investigative reports, audio recordings, the autopsy report, crime scene sketches, photographic and video evidence, and witness statements submitted by LASD Homicide Detectives Jason Marx and Stephanie Shrout.

**FACTUAL ANALYSIS**

On the evening of December 5, 2020, Sotelo assaulted and kidnapped his girlfriend, Chelsea Y. During the kidnapping, Sotelo discharged a firearm which was left at the scene. Several hours after the kidnapping, Chelsea Y. was located and transported to the hospital by her uncle for treatment of the injuries she received as a result of Sotelo's beating. She was interviewed at the hospital by Sheriff's deputies and confirmed other witnesses' accounts of the assault and kidnapping.

During the 24-hour period following the kidnapping, Sotelo was involved in two separate high-speed vehicular pursuits with Sheriff's deputies who were attempting to apprehend him. Both times Sotelo managed to evade capture.

Goff learned about the kidnapping and Sotelo's "wanted" status while performing duties as part of a special security detail on December 6, 2020. Goff acquired additional information that evening prior to starting his overtime shift. Goff was aware that Sotelo was last seen driving a white Jeep Grand Cherokee<sup>1</sup> and that Sotelo may still be in possession of a firearm. When his shift began, Goff drove to Batson Avenue and Colima Road to conduct a patrol check based on information that Sotelo's girlfriend lived in the area. At an apartment complex on Batson Avenue, Goff saw a white Jeep Grand Cherokee backed into a parking stall.

Goff pulled into the parking lot to get a better look. However, Goff was unable to run a license plate number search because the Jeep did not have a front license plate. Goff exited his patrol car and shined a light on the Jeep. Through the windshield, Goff saw Sotelo look up from behind the steering wheel. Goff immediately recognized Sotelo as the kidnapping suspect based on a wanted poster that Goff had previously seen.

Goff activated his radio channel in anticipation of detaining Sotelo at gunpoint. Sotelo then yelled, "Get the fuck out of the way, or I'm going to kill you!" Goff drew his service weapon. Sotelo started the Jeep and put the vehicle in drive. Goff attempted to move out of the way, but Sotelo gunned the engine and struck the front passenger side of the patrol car. The patrol car was pushed sideways into Goff who was positioned near the open driver's side doorway. Goff's right foot became wedged under the patrol vehicle. Goff tried to balance himself on his left foot and yelled at Sotelo to stop. However, Sotelo continued to push the Jeep forward as indicated by the sound of the Jeep's screeching tires and the patrol vehicle's lateral movement into Goff.<sup>2</sup>

Fearing for his life, Goff fired his duty weapon at Sotelo. While firing, Goff pulled his right leg free and backpedaled. Goff continued to hear the sound of screeching tires and sensed that Sotelo was still trying to drive through him. Goff fired his weapon again. The Jeep collided with a closed carport gate and stopped. Goff retreated to the back of his radio car for cover and conducted a tactical reload of his pistol. Goff broadcast that a deputy involved shooting had occurred and held his position until other units arrived. Goff issued commands to Sotelo to show his hands, but Sotelo did not respond.

Once other units arrived, Goff and fellow deputies Jeane Gonzales, Antonio Del Rio, Ruberto Banuelos and Jake Adamo devised a tactical plan to extract and arrest Sotelo. Together they approached the Jeep and opened the driver's side door. Del Rio and Gonzales handcuffed Sotelo. They quickly ascertained that Sotelo was deceased.<sup>3</sup>

Goff was issued a body worn camera (BWC) approximately two months prior to this incident. Although Goff activated the BWC at some point during the incident, he did not do so soon enough for the camera to capture footage of the shooting. The BWC did capture several minutes of Goff aiming his weapon at the driver's side of the Jeep as other deputies converged on the scene.

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<sup>1</sup> Investigators determined that Sotelo had stolen the Cherokee from the Puente Hills Chrysler-Dodge-Jeep dealership.

<sup>2</sup> Goff sustained a right ankle sprain as a result of the incident.

<sup>3</sup> Sotelo was formally pronounced dead a short time later by a firefighter paramedic from Los Angeles County Fire Station 145.

During the shooting investigation, traction marks were observed behind the Jeep between the parking space it had occupied when Goff arrived and the wrought iron gate with which the Jeep collided. Another arc-shaped friction mark corresponded with the path the patrol car's front end took when pushed by the Jeep.



**Figure 1:** Photograph above shows the tire marks made by Jeep Grand Cherokee and Goff's patrol car.

Front end damage to both the patrol car and the Jeep corroborated Goff's statement about what occurred. The Jeep incurred additional front-end damage when it collided with the carport gate. Neither of the vehicles' crash data retrieval systems registered any collision data suggesting that the force of collision was insufficient to register an event. Spackling was observed on the side of the Jeep near the wheel wells indicating that the tires were spun at high velocity, lost traction, and then threw molten rubber against the side of the car. The collision analysis provided by LASD Traffic Services Detail concluded that the initial impact between the vehicles was at low speed; that the driver of the Jeep intentionally accelerated in an effort to push the patrol car out of the way; and that the Jeep continued to accelerate forward until it struck the wrought iron fence.

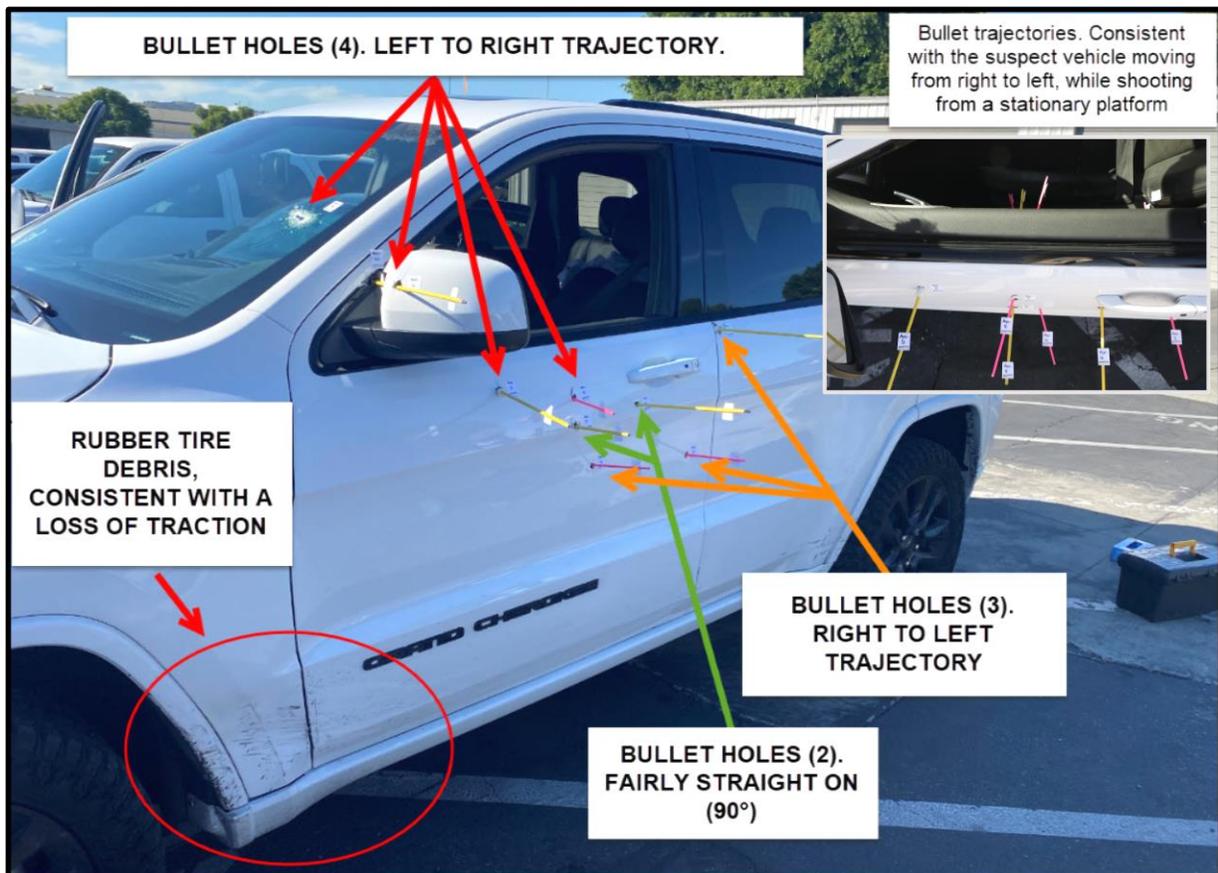


**Figure 2:** Photograph shows front end damage to vehicles from the Jeep ramming the patrol car.

Deputies canvassed the area for witnesses. A few nearby residents reported hearing gunfire, but no one actually saw the shooting. One witness, David K., stated that he looked out his window

and saw a deputy detaining a suspect at gunpoint. Ana R. reported hearing approximately ten gunshots and then looked out her bedroom window to see a deputy pointing a gun at a white sport utility vehicle. Ana R. saw the deputy move towards the trunk of his own car, then walk over to the wall on the north side of the driveway (consistent with activity seen on Goff's BWC footage). Another witness, Ismael S., shot cell phone video footage of Goff moving to cover behind the patrol car.

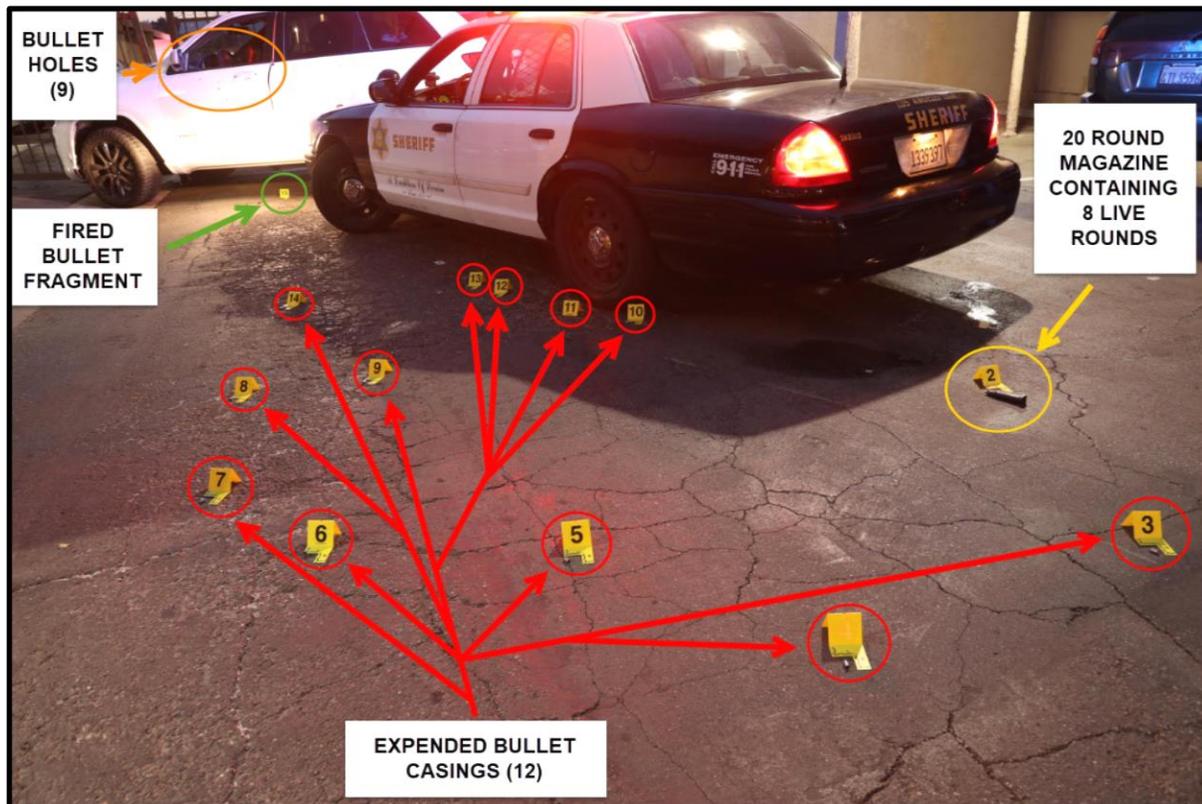
Eleven bullet holes were found on the driver's side exterior of the Jeep, most of them to the driver's side door. A number of corresponding interior holes were found. The bullet holes were rodded. The resulting trajectories displayed a pattern fanning across the driver's door consistent with the vehicle moving past Goff as he fired. Expended bullets and bullet fragments were recovered from the Jeep's front passenger seat, the front passenger interior door panel, and the driver's door.



**Figure 3:** Photograph showing rodded bullet holes displays a pattern consistent with rounds being fired as the vehicle moved past the shooter. Inset photograph shows an overhead view of the rodded bullet holes.

Goff's service weapon, a Staccato Model P 9mm semiautomatic pistol, was examined and found to contain one live round in the chamber and 21 rounds in the mounted magazine. Goff's two spare magazines contained 20 rounds each. Goff's discarded magazine (dropped during the tactical reload) was found near the back of the patrol car and contained eight live rounds. Twelve shell casings bearing identical FC 9mm Luger head stamps were found scattered along

the pavement on the driver's side of the patrol car and provided evidence consistent with Goff's account of the shooting. The evidence is consistent with Goff having fired 12 rounds.



**Figure 4:** Evidence markers in the photograph above show the locations of spent shell casings and other items of evidence.

A LASD crime analyst recovered a glass narcotics pipe containing narcotics residue from Sotelo's lap. A clear plastic baggie containing methamphetamine was found in Sotelo's front left pocket.<sup>4</sup> No firearm was recovered from the Jeep.

On December 10, 2020, Deputy Medical Examiner Job Augustine performed an autopsy on Sotelo's body. Augustine concluded that death resulted from multiple gunshot wounds. Four gunshot wounds were described in the autopsy report. Two of the gunshot wounds were specifically denoted as fatal. The first fatal wound resulted from a bullet that penetrated the left ear, traveled front to back, left to right, and slightly upward into the brain. The second fatal wound was caused by a bullet that penetrated the left cheek, traveled front to back, left to right, and upward into the brain. Sotelo also suffered nonfatal gunshot wounds to the right thumb and his lower left thigh. Deformed bullet jackets were recovered from his body corresponding with each of the four wounds. A toxicology report confirmed the presence of methamphetamine in Sotelo's bloodstream.

<sup>4</sup> Laboratory analysis by the LASD Scientific Services Bureau confirmed that the baggie contained methamphetamine.

## LEGAL ANALYSIS

California law permits the use of deadly force in self-defense or in the defense of others if the person claiming the right actually and reasonably believed that he or others were in imminent danger of great bodily injury or death. Penal Code § 197; *People v. Randle* (2005) 35 Cal.4<sup>th</sup> 987, 994 (overruled on another ground in *People v. Chun* (2009) 45 Cal.4<sup>th</sup> 1172, 1201); *People v. Humphrey* (1996) 13 Cal.4<sup>th</sup> 1073, 1082; *see also*, CALCRIM No. 505.

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).

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).

In assessing 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, is 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).

In evaluating whether a police officer's use of force was reasonable, 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 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.

The evidence in this investigation reveals that Goff encountered Sotelo while working alone on patrol. Sotelo was a wanted and dangerous suspect who had recently committed a crime of violence against his girlfriend that sent her to the hospital. Goff found Sotelo behind the wheel of a vehicle that Sotelo had recently used to evade police capture in two high speed pursuits. When Sotelo saw Goff, he immediately threatened to kill the deputy and then proceeded to ram the patrol car presumably in an effort to push the vehicle out of the way so that Sotelo could flee. By engaging in this action, Sotelo clearly acted in wanton disregard for the deputy's safety. After becoming

imperiled by the force of his own vehicle being pushed into him by the Jeep, Goff fired his duty weapon resulting in Sotelo being shot and killed.

Sotelo had the present ability, opportunity, and apparent intent to cause immediate death or serious bodily injury to Goff and others. Due to the fact that Sotelo had placed Goff's life in danger, and had also committed a felony that threatened death or serious harm to others the previous day, Sotelo presented an imminent threat of death or serious bodily harm that needed to be immediately addressed. Under these circumstances, it was reasonable for Goff to use deadly force to defend himself and to protect the public from further potential harm. In so doing, Goff acted in a manner consistent with how an objectively reasonable peace officer would react in similar circumstances.

## **CONCLUSION**

We find that Deputy Goff acted in lawful self-defense when he used deadly force against Christian Sotelo.