

**Fatal Officer Involved Shooting of Raymundo Ceja
Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department**

Deputy Tarek Salah, #629107

J.S.I.D. File #20-0074



GEORGE GASCÓN

District Attorney

Justice System Integrity Division

September 26, 2022

MEMORANDUM

TO: CAPTAIN ANDREW D. MEYER
Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department
Homicide Bureau
1 Cupania Circle
Monterey Park, California 91755

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

SUBJECT: Fatal Officer Involved Shooting of Raymundo Ceja
J.S.I.D. File #20-0074
L.A.S.D. File #020-03105-0600-013

DATE: September 26, 2022

The Justice System Integrity Division of the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office has completed its review of the March 1, 2020, fatal shooting of Raymundo Ceja by Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) Deputy Tarek Salah. We have concluded that Deputy Salah acted in lawful self-defense and the defense of others.

The District Attorney's Command Center was notified of this shooting on March 1, 2020, at approximately 3:43 p.m. The District Attorney Response Team (DART) responded to the location, where they received a briefing and walk-through of the scene.

The following analysis is based on police reports, radio transmissions, LASD video surveillance, recorded interviews, crime scene photographs, ballistic reports, autopsy and toxicology reports, and other evidence submitted to this office by LASD Homicide Bureau Detectives Christopher Dimmitt and John O'Brien. Salah's voluntary statement was considered in this analysis. LASD deputies at the Santa Clarita Station were not equipped with body cameras when this incident occurred.

FACTUAL ANALYSIS

On March 1, 2020, at 1:47 p.m., Raymundo Ceja parked a friend's Hyundai Sonata in the Santa Clarita Sheriff's Station public parking lot. Approximately forty minutes later, Ceja drove into the employee parking lot and parked in the northeast corner. At 2:29 p.m., Deputy Tarek Salah, who was wearing a full uniform, drove a marked, black-and-white patrol vehicle northbound in the employee parking lot towards the exit. [REDACTED] was accompanying Salah for a ride-along and was seated in the front passenger seat. As Salah drove towards the exit, Ceja walked westbound in front of Salah's vehicle pointing what appeared to be a black, semiautomatic handgun directly at Salah. Salah exited the patrol vehicle, drew his duty weapon, and gave Ceja commands to drop the handgun. Several other deputies saw Ceja pointing what appeared to be a

handgun at Salah and gave Ceja commands to drop the weapon. Ceja stopped approximately ten feet in front of Salah and continued pointing the handgun directly at him. Salah told investigators that he believed Ceja was going to shoot and kill him. Salah fired two rounds from his duty weapon, striking Ceja twice. Ceja dropped the handgun and fell to the ground. Deputies approached Ceja and rendered medical aid. A replica Taurus airsoft pistol was recovered from the pavement next to Ceja. The Los Angeles County Fire Department (LAFD) transported Ceja to the Henry Mayo Newhall Hospital, where he was pronounced deceased at 3:05 p.m.



Replica pistol recovered from the scene.

██████████ told investigators that as Salah was driving towards the exit, Ceja appeared on the front passenger side of the vehicle and continued walking laterally towards the driver's side while pointing a handgun directly at Salah. Salah stopped the vehicle and gave Ceja commands to drop the handgun. ██████████ was concerned for his own safety, but said Ceja seemed focused on Salah. ██████████ heard one gunshot before Ceja fell to the ground.

LASD video surveillance captured the incident and is consistent with the statements Salah and other witnesses made to investigators.

Investigators interviewed Ceja's family and friends. Ceja's father told investigators a month before the incident, Ceja said he was "stressed," was hearing voices, and had tried to kill himself with a handgun. One of Ceja's brothers told his father that Ceja had been using narcotics and believed somebody was "after him." Ceja lost his job a month before the incident. ██████████ told investigators Ceja had been staying at her apartment for a month. On the day of the incident, Ceja dropped ██████████ off at her work in her Hyundai. Later that morning, Ceja sent ██████████ a message saying he was not feeling well and was outside. When ██████████ spoke to Ceja, he told her he was hearing voices. Ceja left after ██████████'s lunch break and arranged to pick her up at 3:00 p.m. At 2:00 p.m., Ceja sent ██████████ a message saying he

loved her, everything was fine, and her Hyundai would be at the police station. [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] messaged Ceja but he did not respond. [REDACTED], Ceja's ex-girlfriend and mother of his child, told investigators Ceja had been losing weight and was acting paranoid during the last month. On the day of the incident, Ceja sent [REDACTED] messages saying goodbye.

Autopsy Report

On March 3, 2020, Los Angeles County Deputy Medical Examiner Zuhha Ashraf performed an autopsy and determined Ceja's cause of death to be gunshot wounds. Ceja suffered one gunshot wound to the midline upper chest that perforated his lung and one gunshot wound to the upper left thigh. The trajectory of both wounds was front to back, left to right and downward. Toxicology results indicated the presence of cocaine in Ceja's blood sample.

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 of self-defense or the defense of others actually and reasonably believed that he or others were in imminent danger of great bodily injury or death. Penal Code section 197; *People v. Randle* (2005) 35 Cal.4th 987, 994 (overruled on another ground in *People v. Chun* (2009) 45 Cal.4th 1172, 1201); *People v. Humphrey* (1996) 13 Cal.4th 1073, 1082; *see also*, CALCRIM No. 505. The prosecution has the burden of proving beyond a reasonable doubt that a killing was not justified. CALCRIM Nos. 505, 507.

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 section 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 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) & (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).

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.

Salah was driving through a crowded employee parking lot with a passenger when Ceja walked in front of his patrol vehicle pointing what Salah believed was a black, semiautomatic handgun in his direction. Salah and other deputies gave Ceja commands to drop the handgun. Ceja did not comply and continued pointing the handgun directly at Salah. Based on the totality of the circumstances, Salah reasonably believed the use of deadly force was necessary to defend against an imminent threat of serious bodily injury or death to Salah and others when he discharged his duty weapon. The fact that the handgun was later found to be an airsoft pistol does not alter the reasonableness of Salah's actions.

CONCLUSION

We find that Deputy Tarek Salah acted in lawful self-defense and the defense of others when he fired his duty weapon.