

Fatal Officer Involved Shooting of Joanna Lua

Los Angeles Police Department

Officer Mackay Hurtado #44469

J.S.I.D. File #24-0199



NATHAN J. HOCHMAN

District Attorney

Justice System Integrity Division

December 22, 2025

MEMORANDUM

TO: CAPTAIN OMAR BAZULTO
Los Angeles Police Department
Force Investigation Division
100 West First Street, Suite 431
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FROM: JUSTICE SYSTEM INTEGRITY DIVISION
Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office

SUBJECT: Fatal Officer Involved Shooting of Joanna Lua
J.S.I.D. File #24-0199
L.A.P.D. File #F031-24

DATE: December 22, 2025

The Justice System Integrity Division of the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office has completed its review of the June 15, 2024, fatal shooting of Joanna Lua by Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) Officer Mackay Hurtado. We have concluded Officer Hurtado acted in lawful self-defense at the time he fired his service weapon, reasonably believing based on the totality of the circumstances deadly force was necessary to defend against an imminent deadly threat.

The District Attorney's Command Center was notified of the shooting at 12:35 a.m. on June 15, 2024. The District Attorney Response Team responded and was given a briefing and walk-through of the scene by LAPD Force Investigation Division (FID) Lieutenant Jess Falk.

The following analysis is based on body worn camera video (BWC), investigative reports, surveillance video, audio recordings and transcripts of witness interviews, crime scene diagrams, and the autopsy report submitted to this office by LAPD FID Detective Tim Grabe on February 24, 2025. Officer Hurtado's compelled statement was not considered as part of this analysis.

INTRODUCTION

On June 15, 2024, LAPD Officers Mackay Hurtado and Israel Cabrera responded to a family violence disturbance call in Van Nuys.¹ The 9-1-1 caller stated her sister, Joanna Lua, was armed with a knife and attempting to enter the caller's locked room. When officers arrived, they heard loud banging inside the residence and believed Lua was actively attacking her family members.

The officers banged on the front door and announced their presence. When no one answered, Hurtado kicked open the door. Lua appeared from the hallway armed with a large kitchen knife.

¹ The LAPD officers arrived at the location in marked black and white patrol cars with light bars, dressed in LAPD uniforms with badges and nameplates.

Despite orders to drop the knife, Lua continued to approach the officers, prompting an officer involved shooting. Lua was transported to the hospital where she was pronounced deceased.

FACTUAL ANALYSIS

On June 15, 2024, at approximately 12:34 a.m., LAPD Communications Division (CD) received a 9-1-1 call from [REDACTED] who said her sister, Joanna Lua, was on drugs while armed with a knife and threatening her. [REDACTED] said Lua suffered from mental illness and was drunk. [REDACTED] was locked inside her bedroom but Lua was attempting to pry open the bedroom door with the knife.

At approximately 12:35 a.m., CD broadcast, “Mission [Patrol Division] units with SMART, violent female with mental illness . . . threatening [her sister]. The [sister] is locked in her bedroom.”² The suspect is under the influence of an unknown narco and 390.”³

Three minutes later, at 12:38:37, CD updated the broadcast, “[V]iolent female . . . is now an ADW suspect there now . . . The suspect is 390 and under the influence of meth. [Lua] is attempting to make entry into [her sister’s] bedroom with a knife.”

Cabrera and Hurtado responded to [REDACTED]’s apartment complex located on Van Nuys Boulevard. As they approached the apartment unit, Cabrera was armed with a less-lethal Taser and a 40mm Less-Lethal Launcher (40mm), while Hurtado, designated as the “cover” officer, unholstered his service weapon.

At 12:39:02 a.m., CD broadcast, “. . . the line is still open, the [caller] is no longer heard. The suspect was heard entering into the room.” CD updated the call at 12:40:00 a.m. and added, “The suspect did not make entry into the room [but] is attempting to gain entry using a knife to open the door.”

BWV shows Cabrera attempting to open the front door. When Cabrera is unable to open the front door, he knocks on the door. Hurtado radios a request to CD to ask [REDACTED] to step outside the apartment. At 12:43:03 a.m., CD responds, “[REDACTED] is unable to step out [to answer the door]. [Lua] is back at her door, attempting to gain entry. [REDACTED] is locked in her bedroom.”

BWV shows Cabrera and Hurtado move away from the door and onto the stairwell. Officers Jasmine Aguilar and Marco Guerrero arrive to assist. As the officers stand on the stairwell, Cabrera says he heard the apartment balcony sliding glass door open. BWV depicts Hurtado announcing, “It’s the police department!” Cabrera yells, “LAPD!”

At 12:43:03 a.m., CD broadcast, “The suspect is impeding [Lua’s] mom and [REDACTED] from stepping outside the apartment.” [REDACTED], a resident of the apartment complex, approached the officers and told Aguilar an eight-year-old child and her grandmother lived in the apartment with [REDACTED]. Aguilar told Hurtado and Cabrera a child lived in the apartment. Cabrera yelled, “Hello!

² SMART refers to LAPD’s Systemwide Mental Assessment Response Team consisting of a mental health clinician and a sworn officer. The team is part of the Mental Health Evaluation Unit (MEU) which responds to calls regarding individuals suffering from mental health issues.

³ Radio code 390 refers to an individual who is intoxicated in public.

LAPD! Come out with your hands up! Right now!” There was no response from anyone inside the apartment, but the officers heard the balcony slider forcefully close.

At 12:45:14 a.m., CD verified the officers were at the right apartment and broadcast, “[The sister] is unable to step out [of the apartment]. She’s locked in her room. [Lua] is at her door with a knife and not allowing their mother to step out as well.”

Hurtado’s BWV captured noises from inside the apartment. Hurtado and Cabrera can be heard giving commands for Lua to open the door and exit with her hands up. The officers discuss “exigent circumstances” and the need to kick open the door.⁴

On BWV, Cabrera and Hurtado attempt to establish a rapport with Lua. Cabrera asks Lua to open the door and tells her they want to ensure everyone inside the apartment is “okay.” Lua responds, “Everyone is okay.” Cabrera tells Lua the officers want to check on everyone inside the apartment, to verify everyone is okay. Lua responds, “No! No! You have no right motherfucker!” The officers continue to order Lua to open the door.

Sergeant Cameron Gobble arrived at the apartment complex. Aguilar advised Gobble of the fact [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were locked in a bedroom inside the apartment. Aguilar further relayed information Lua was not allowed to be at the location, was drunk, and armed with a knife. At 12:47:40 a.m., CD broadcast, “The [sister] is still on the [phone] line and she is afraid to step out. [Lua] is still armed with a knife.”

BWV shows Cabrera load his 40mm and remove his Taser from its holster. CD broadcast at 12:49:53 a.m., “The [sister] says she is in fear. She does not want to step out. The suspect put the knife to her neck earlier. There’s two additional people in the home that are in fear to open the door. They’re in the living room with [Lua].”

At 12:50:28 a.m., the officers’ BWV captured three loud bangs from inside the apartment. Six seconds later, Gobble broadcast, “Okay. Roger. Just advise [REDACTED] that officers are making entry.”

Cabrera told investigators he believed the family inside the apartment were in danger. Cabrera explained his thought process while he stood outside the apartment door, “[Lua]’s going to try to enter the room and harm them. That’s why they generated the call in the first place. I don’t want [Lua] to gain access to the room where the family was while we were there. I didn’t want them to be in harm’s way with her potentially to stab them.”

BWV shows Hurtado announcing, “Hey! If you don’t come out with your hands up, we are going to kick down the door!” Cabrera stands to the right of Hurtado, armed with a Taser. At 12:50:44 a.m. Hurtado announces, “You guys ready?” before the officers begin kicking the door. As the door swings open, Lua appears from the apartment hallway.

Both officers stand at the threshold of the apartment door. Hurtado unholsters his service weapon while Cabrera points the Taser at Lua. Cabrera shouts, “Let me see your hands ma’am!”

⁴ “Exigent circumstances” refers to situations requiring law enforcement officers to act immediately and is an exception to the warrant requirement.

BWV shows Lua exit the hallway while armed with the knife in her right hand. Cabrera and Hurtado shout multiple times, “Put the knife down!” Hurtado yells, “Drop the knife!”

BWV shows at 12:50:58 a.m., Lua advances toward the officers and raises the knife. The officers are standing approximately eight feet away from Lua when Hurtado discharges one round from his service weapon and Cabrera simultaneously deploys his Taser. (Figure 1)

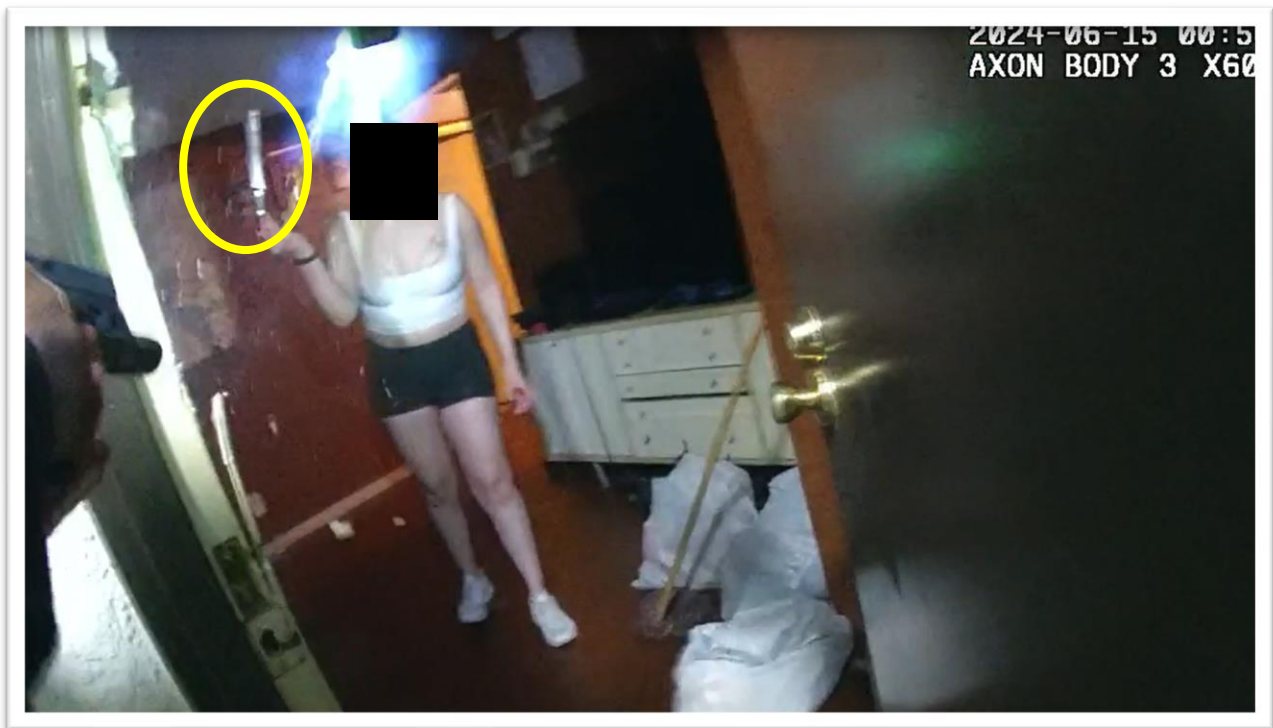


Figure 1: Cabrera's BWV depicting Cabrera firing his Taser as Lua refuses to follow orders to drop the knife (yellow circle).

Lua was hit by the Taser darts and the round, causing her to drop the knife and reach for her stomach. Hurtado continued to order Lua to drop the knife. Lua stumbled and fell against the couch.

Cabrera told investigators after the incident, [A]t that point [when she approached us] I feared for my life. I feared for my partner's life that she was continuing to close the distance with a knife in her hand. [When] she raised it and I thought she was going to stab me and my partner.”

Cabrera said, “I was fearing that . . . she was going to harm me or my partner by stabbing us. So that is when I deployed my Taser to prevent her from continuing to close the distance on me and my partner.”

Lua was handcuffed and placed in a recovery position. The Los Angeles Fire Department responded to the location and transported Lua to Providence Holy Cross Medical Center in Mission Hills. Lua did not respond to medical treatment, and was pronounced deceased at 1:29 a.m.

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█████ told investigators she believed Lua became addicted to methamphetamine while attending middle school. █████. said Lua's daughter lives with them because the Department of Child and Family Services terminated Lua's parental rights approximately one year ago after Lua burned her daughter's hand with a cigarette.

█████ said Lua began arguing with her “for no reason.” Lua left the apartment and returned 15 to 20 minutes later “chugging” a “tall” can of alcohol. Lua became aggressive and began to argue with █████. █████ said she and █████ went into her bedroom and locked the door. Lua shouted at them and attempted to open the bedroom door. █████ said she unlocked the bedroom door to see what was happening. When she opened the door she realized Lua had a “10-12 inch” kitchen knife in her hand. Lua swung the knife at █████, narrowly missing █████’s face before █████ was able to quickly move away and slam the door shut. █████ said if she had not moved away quickly “... she would have stabbed my face.” █████ believed Lua was trying to kill her.

█████. said Lua came to the apartment few weeks earlier and was confrontational with █████ and the police were called to intervene.

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Autopsy Report

On June 17, 2024, Deputy Medical Examiner Scott Luzi performed a post-mortem examination of Lua's remains. Dr. Luzi concluded the cause of death was a single gunshot wound to the abdomen.

Toxicology

Toxicology testing conducted at the time of the autopsy determined Lua had a blood alcohol content of 0.268g percent alcohol in her abdominal blood, and 0.115g percent alcohol in her femoral blood, at the time of her death.

Weapon

Criminalists photographed Lua's knife on the living room floor. (Figure 2) The overall length of the knife was 12 inches, and the blade was eight inches.



Figure 2: Photograph depicting Lua's knife.

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).

CD advised Hurtado and Cabrera that Lua was inside the apartment and armed with a knife. They were updated several times and told, “The suspect did not make entry into the room [but] is attempting to gain entry using a knife to open the door.” They could hear Lua banging on doors inside the apartment and knew an eight-year-old child was inside. As a result, they reasonably believed the danger to the family inside was imminent.

The officers believed the banging they heard from inside the apartment was Lua trying to get inside the bedroom to stab her family, creating exigent circumstances under which they needed to kick the door open. As soon as the officers kicked the door open, Lua appeared armed with the knife. Despite their orders for her to drop the knife, Lua advanced towards the officers holding the knife, coming within only eight feet of them.

At the time Hurtado fired his service weapon, Lua was advancing toward him while holding the knife. When she raised the knife, it would be reasonable for Hurtado to believe Lua posed an imminent deadly threat to himself and Cabrera. Cabrera’s actions and statements regarding the incident corroborate the fact Hurtado’s fear of imminent deadly harm was reasonable under the circumstances.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, we find that Officer Hurtado acted lawfully in self-defense and the defense of others.