

State of Connecticut
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL



Report Concerning
Use of Deadly Force by Bridgeport Police Department
on May 16, 2024
Against Dale Stephenson

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Acknowledgements

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Bridgeport Police Department

Bridgeport Judicial District State's Attorney's Office

Western District Major Crime Squad

INTRODUCTION

On May 16, 2024, at approximately 6:01 a.m., on Birdseye Street in the City of Bridgeport, police officer Israel Colon¹ fired three gunshots at Dale Stephenson² who had sprinted at Officer Colon while holding two large knives above his head. Stephenson was seriously wounded but survived the shooting. As required by statute,³ the Office of Inspector General investigated this officer-involved shooting. The results of this investigation are contained in this report.

The investigation reveals that, on May 16, 2024, just before 6:00 a.m., several individuals called 911 to report that a man was on Birdseye Street in Bridgeport acting erratically, knocking on doors, and waving two large knives in the air. The Bridgeport Police Department dispatched several officers to 203 Birdseye Street, including Officer Colon and Officer Darryl Wilson, Jr. When Officer Colon arrived in his police cruiser, he saw, even before exiting his cruiser, Stephenson in the middle of the street holding two knives. He called dispatch on his radio and asked for additional units to assist. At 6:01 a.m., Colon exited his vehicle and was standing approximately 60 feet from Stephenson. Colon immediately attempted to engage with Stephenson by stating “Hey, brother!” Just as he did so, Officer Wilson pulled his cruiser alongside Colon’s cruiser.

Before Officer Wilson could exit his cruiser, and before Colon had time to make any additional effort to speak to Stephenson, Stephenson began sprinting directly at Colon with a knife in each hand and raised over his head. As Stephenson charged at him, Colon yelled three times, “Don’t do it!” Officer Colon moved backwards, attempting to keep distance between himself and Stephenson, but Stephenson closed the distance very rapidly. Colon fired three rounds at his attacker when Stephenson was within five feet of him. Stephenson suffered gunshot wounds to his left forearm and left leg. The officers provided Stephenson immediate medical aid, and he subsequently was transported to St. Vincent’s Hospital for further medical treatment. He recovered from his wounds.

Based on our investigation, I conclude that, under the totality of the circumstances, Officer Colon honestly believed that Stephenson posed an imminent threat of serious injury or

¹ Officer Colon is a Hispanic male, who, on the date of the incident, was 28 years of age, and had been a Bridgeport police officer for approximately five years. He had no disciplinary history.

² Dale Stephenson is a black male, who, on the date of the incident, was 49 years of age.

³ As relevant here, General Statutes §51-277a(a)(1) provides: “Whenever a peace officer, in the performance of such officer’s duties, uses physical force upon another person and such person dies as a result thereof or uses deadly force, as defined in section 53a-3, upon another person, the Division of Criminal Justice shall cause an investigation to be made and the Inspector General shall have the responsibility of determining whether the use of force by the peace officer was justifiable under section 53a-22.”

death to him. I determine that Officer Colon's use of deadly physical force was objectively reasonable and justified under the applicable legal standards.

INVESTIGATION

Scene

The scene was secured by the Bridgeport Police Department and subsequently processed by the Connecticut State Police Western District Major Crime Squad. The primary scene was determined to be an area of Birdseye Street in front of an apartment building located at 211 Birdseye St., and a secondary scene constituting the front walkway of an apartment building located with an address of 155 Birdseye St.

The street is a two-lane asphalt roadway approximately one tenth of a mile long, running in a northeast/southwest direction between Norman Street and Wood Avenue. It is populated by apartment buildings and multi-family homes.



(Birdseye Street—Primary Scene)



(Primary Scene)

Three Federal .45 caliber expended shell casings were located, photographed and seized from the road surface in the primary scene. (Evidence marker ##s 10, 11 and 12). Specifically, they were located in an area to the rear of Officer Colon's cruiser.





Two Farberware knives⁴ were located, photographed and collected from the road surface near the rear driverside door of Officer Colon's cruiser. (Evidence marker ##s 14 and 15) The knives were measured and both found to have a blade length of eight inches.



⁴ Each knife meets the definition of a dangerous instrument because it can cause death or serious physical injury "under the circumstances in which is used or attempted or threatened to be used." General Statutes §53a-3(7). Under the circumstances of this case, and because the edge portion of the blade of each knife is four inches or more in length, Stephenson committed the crime of Carrying a Dangerous Weapon, an E felony, when he charged at Officer Colon. See General Statutes §53-206.

Stephenson later pled guilty to the criminal offenses of Criminal Attempt to Commit Assault in the Second Degree and Carrying a Dangerous Weapon. He is awaiting sentencing on those matters.



On the northern side of Birdseye Street, southwest of the driveway entrance for lot #40/48, a black sword with a black handle and gold accents was located, photographed and seized from a section of grass. The sword had a blade that was measured to 28 inches long. It was documented by Evidence marker #16.



(Sword with black handle)

At 155 Birdseye Street, a black sword sheath was located, photographed and collected on a cement walkway near the entrance to Apartment A7. The sword sheath was assigned Evidence marker # 9.



(155 Birdseye Street)



(Black sword sheath)

The investigation revealed that Dale Stephenson resided at 203 Birdseye St., Apartment A9 at the time of the incident.

Statements

Officer Israel Colon

On June 20, 2024, Officer Israel Colon provided a written sworn statement to an inspector from the Office of Inspector General. The statement provides:

“On 05/16/24 I was assigned to Blue 17, located on the west side of Bridgeport. At around 05:55 am, I was dispatched to the area of Birdseye St on a report of a suspicious male party armed with two knives. My cover unit Officer Daryll Wilson Jr. was assigned Blue 15.

“While enroute, [ECC] (Emergency Communications Center) advised me they received additional calls for service, stating that several complainants observed a male party dressed in black, wearing glasses, acting erratically, and knocking on doors while brandishing a large knife. The complainants also advised that the party appeared to act as if he was stabbing the air while walking around the area. I approached the scene in my marked vehicle from the area of Wood Ave. and Birdseye St.

“While driving eastbound on Birdseye St., I observed a male on the left side of the road, crossing mid-block on Birdseye St. This party was wearing a dark-colored uniform with a reflective shirt. This party was one of the complainants, I approached him after he flagged us down. He stated the man with the knives was standing on the sidewalk near the fence across the street. As I pulled my marked patrol vehicle over to the right side of the road near the 200 block of Birdseye St, I observed a black male dressed in black holding two visible stainless-steel butcher-style knives. He was standing on the sidewalk looking inside a parking lot located across the street, I advised ECC to send additional units and have AMR (American Medical Response) stage nearby. At this point, the responsible party was looking directly at me. He was in the middle of the road standing about 25 feet from the front of my patrol vehicle. I immediately exited my cruiser and stood next to the driver’s door of my patrol vehicle, I observed his hands to his sides displaying both knives. I called out to the male party, ‘Hey, brother’ attempting to establish verbal communication to de-escalate the situation. The man appeared to start to breathe heavily as if he was getting ready to charge. I maintained my distance and attempted to speak with him again, he immediately started to sprint toward me, holding both knives [forward] above his shoulders. I immediately began to backstep, giving him loud, clear verbal commands, ‘Don’t do it, don’t do it, don’t do it.’ As I attempted to create more distance and time, I unholstered my department-issued firearm. He continued to run directly toward me ignoring my orders. He appeared to be running at full speed covering the distance between us in a few seconds. Within those seconds he continued to hold the knives forward above his shoulders and screamed something. When he was only several feet in front of me with no objects between us, I discharged my firearm two times. As I stepped to my left

side in a circular motion, trying to get out of his direct path, I discharged my firearm one more time. The man passed me falling face-first on the ground, dropping both knives.

“After discharging my firearm, I observed the party on the ground for a few seconds to see if he was still an active threat. At the same time, I attempted to update ECC over my department-issued handheld radio. I was unable to establish communication due to radio traffic. After assessing that the responsible party was no longer a threat, I approached him and brushed both knives away with my hands to make sure they were out of reach. I then handcuffed the male party and flipped him over on his back. At this time, my cover officer, Wilson Jr, had established radio communication with ECC, gave an update, and requested AMR. I immediately started providing medical aid to the responsible party while talking to him, trying to ensure he remained conscious and asking him where he was injured. I observed blood on his left thigh area, where I then used my CAT tourniquet and placed it above the wound area. I then continued to ask him where he was struck. He did not answer. I then grabbed my pocketknife and cut his shirt open to look for any other wounds in his torso area: I was unable to find any entry wounds. I then put him on his left side and started scanning his back with my hand, but I was still unable to find any wounds.

“Several extra assisting units had arrived and started to secure the scene. I then stepped away from the responsible party and advised the arriving units to stay with him and make sure he remained conscious until AMR arrived so they could provide further medical aid. I then advised several other officers to stand by the knives on the ground. Additional officers were told to gather the witnesses’ names and statements. AMR and my supervisor, Sgt. Pomales, arrived taking charge of the scene.”

Officer Darryl Wilson, Jr.

Officer Darryl Wilson, Jr. filed a police report,⁵ which states in relevant part:

“On 05/16/24 at approximately 0600 hours, [I] responded to 219 Birdseye Street to assist Officer Colon on reports of a suspicious person. Per [dispatch], they had received several reports of a black male party (later identified as Stephenson, Dale) . . . wearing a black jacket, black pants, glasses, and waving a knife. Shortly after, [dispatch] advised Officer Colon and I that they had received an additional call from a complainant, reporting that they were now observing

⁵ Officer Wilson did not file a police report regarding this incident until August 4, 2025, four hundred and forty-five days after it happened. Such a lengthy delay in filing a report is problematic and concerning, particularly in a case in which the officer failing to file the report is one of the principal witnesses to another officer’s use of deadly force. Although I have determined that the use of deadly force by Officer Colon was legally justified, it still is of utmost importance for officers to make a record of these events as contemporaneously as possible to the incident, when memories are the freshest. The Bridgeport Police Department should take steps to ensure that such reports are filed and reviewed by superior officers on a timely basis.

Stephenson waving what appeared to be two knives in the air, mimicking stabbing motions while yelling and talking to himself.

"Upon arrival, [I] observed a female party standing outside her vehicle, which was parked in a driveway near the corner of Birdseye Street and Wood Avenue. [I] provided the female with a description of the clothing Stephenson was reportedly wearing and inquired if she had seen anyone matching that description in the area. The female party looked eastbound on Birdseye Street, toward the direction of Norman Street, and she advised [me] that Stephenson may possibly be in that area.

"As Officer Colon and I proceeded eastbound on Birdseye Street in patrol vehicles, [I] observed a male party, later confirmed to be Stephenson, standing on the sidewalk near a gated fence. Stephenson matched the description previously provided to officers and he was observed holding a large knife in each hand (one in his left hand and one in his right). As Officer Colon exited his cruiser . . . to make contact with Stephenson, Stephenson began walking eastbound on Birdseye Street toward Norman Street. . . .

"[I] began following Stephenson in my police vehicle. Stephenson then moved into the middle of the roadway before coming to a complete stop. A moment later, [I] observed Stephenson turn around and begin running westbound on Birdseye Street (directly toward Officer Colon) with both knives raised in the air in an aggressive manner, appearing to intend to stab Officer Colon.

"[I] attempted to intercept and block Stephenson's path of travel with my police vehicle, however, I was unsuccessful due to the cruiser stalling out.

"At that moment, [I] overheard what sounded like several gunshots.

"[I] exited the cruiser and observed Stephenson now lying on the ground. [I] immediately broadcasted details of the incident over Channel #1 and requested for a supervisor to respond, I then requested for AMR to respond to said location in attempt for medics to attend to Stephenson, and additional units to assist with securing and locking down the crime scene.

"Officer Colon then proceeded to apply a tourniquet to Stephenson due to him suffering from a gunshot wound.

Civilian Witness #1

Civilian Witness #1, a resident of an apartment on Birdseye St. was interviewed by inspectors from the Office of Inspector General. The interview was recorded on the body-worn camera of one of the inspectors. Civilian Witness #1 told the inspectors that he called 911 after hearing a commotion on the street. He indicated that as he was exiting the building he saw a police officer pull up to the location. He stated that he witnessed an individual charge at the officer holding a butcher knife in each hand. According to this witness, the officer exclaimed "don't do it, don't do it" and ordered the individual to put the knives down. He reported that one of the two officers fired three shots at the individual who had charged at him. The witness indicated that the individual fell on the ground after being shot and was secured by the officers.

Civilian Witness #2

Civilian Witness #2, who was staying in an apartment at 211 Birdseye St., was interviewed by inspectors from the Office of Inspector General. The interview was recorded on the body worn camera of one of the inspectors. Civilian Witness #2 told the inspectors that he heard noises coming from the street and a man yelling gibberish and waving knives in the air. He indicated that he warned a passerby about the man with the knives. When two police cruisers arrived on the street, he told the officers where the individual could be found. The witness then states that the individual charged at an officer with a knife in each hand. He then described hearing “two, no more than three, gunshots.” According to the witness, an ambulance arrived shortly thereafter.

Civilian Witness #3

Civilian Witness #3 was interviewed by inspectors from the Office of Inspector General in her apartment on Birdseye St. The interview was recorded on the body worn camera of one of the inspectors. The witness told the officers that she was awoken in the night by a man yelling and knocking on apartment doors. She observed him from the window of her apartment and saw that he was holding a knife or possibly a sword and used her cellphone to take a photograph of him. In the photograph, a man in black clothing appears to be holding two knives over his head. This witness did not see the shooting but did hear three or four gunshots.

Digital Evidence

Officer Colon's BWC video

Officer Colon's BWC video shows that he arrived on Birdseye Street at 6:00 a.m. As he exited his cruiser at 6:01 a.m., he can be heard asking for additional units to respond because he could see an individual with two knives. Once Colon is standing outside his cruiser, and just after another police cruiser has pulled up next to his vehicle, he turned to his right where a person wearing black clothing can be seen standing in the middle of the street. Officer Colon immediately said “hey, brother.” Almost instantaneously, the man began to sprint directly at Colon, who was then standing in a gap approximately 7 feet wide between the two police cruisers. The man yelled and had the knives held over his head in a menacing fashion. Officer Colon quickly drew his service weapon and stepped backwards and to his left. The person with the knives reached the front of Colon's cruiser and was approximately five feet from Colon, who was then standing adjacent to the rear driver side door of his cruiser. At this point, Colon fired

three rounds in rapid succession, which caused the individual to drop the knives and fall to the ground. Colon quickly reported “17” (his call sign) on his police radio, handcuffed the person laying on the ground and began to render medical aid by applying a tourniquet on his left leg. An ambulance arrived at 6:06 a.m.

[Click [here](#) to view Officer Colon’s BWC video]

Officer Wilson’s BWC video

Officer Wilson’s BWC video shows that he exited his cruiser, which he had pulled alongside the cruiser driven by Officer, just after the shooting had occurred. As a result, it does not capture the salient moments of the incident.

[Click [here](#) to view Officer Wilson’s BWC video]

Hospital Records

Pursuant to a search and seizure warrant, the medical records of Dale Stephenson were obtained from St. Vincent Hospital in Bridgeport. Those records reveal that Stephenson underwent treatment for two gunshot wounds, one to his left leg and one to his left arm. At the hospital, Stephenson exhibited aggressive behavior, including spitting at the medical staff. He tested positive for cannabis and benzodiazepine use. His wounds were not fatal.

Forensics

Officer Colon’s firearm and duty belt were seized following the incident. Colon’s Smith and Wesson MP .45 caliber handgun (Serial #NBX7586) was test fired and found to be operable. This weapon and its magazine had a firing capacity of ten rounds. Colon was carrying two additional ten round capacity magazines. At the time the weapon and magazine were seized, twenty-seven rounds of ammunition were recovered. This inventory is consistent with Officer Colon having fired three rounds.

A side-by-side comparison of the three shell casings seized at the scene demonstrated that they were fired from the same firearm. A comparison of a shell casing obtained by test firing the firearm to each of the three shell casings collected at the scene of the incident near Colon’s cruiser indicates that each of the shell casings recovered from the scene were ejected from Officer Colon’s firearm.

FINDINGS

The investigation supports the following findings of material fact:

1. In the early morning hours of May 16, 2024, on Birdseye Street in the City of Bridgeport, Dale Stephenson was acting erratically. He was knocking on apartment doors, disturbing the neighbors, waving knives in the air and speaking gibberish. Stephenson was suffering from a mental health crisis and was likely under the influence of intoxicating substances.
2. Officer Israel Colon and Officer Daryll Wilson, Jr. were dispatched to Birdseye Street to investigate the disturbance. They arrived in separate cruisers at 6:00 a.m. Officer Colon observed Stephenson standing in the middle of Birdseye Street holding two knives.
3. Officer Colon exited his vehicle while calling for additional backup on his police radio.
4. As Colon exited his vehicle, Officer Wilson pulled his cruiser alongside and just to the left of the cruiser driven by Officer Colon. This created a somewhat narrow alleyway between the two cruisers where Colon was now standing.
5. Officer Colon turned towards Stephenson and attempted to speak with Stephenson who was facing him by yelling "Hey, brother!"
6. Stephenson was standing approximately 60 feet from Colon.
7. Stephenson immediately began sprinting towards Colon with a large knife in each hand held over his head in a menacing fashion.
8. Officer Colon shouted "Don't do it!" three times and drew his service weapon, but Stephenson did not stop or drop the knives.
9. Officer Colon moved backwards and to his left a few feet as Stephenson drew near.
10. When Stephenson reached an area just to the left of the front bumper of Colon's cruiser, he was within five feet of Colon.
11. Colon then fired three rounds at Stephenson to defend himself from the imminent use of deadly physical force.
12. Two rounds struck Stephenson and caused him to drop the knives and fall to the ground.
13. Officers provided medical aid to Stephenson who ultimately survived his wounds.

LAW

The use of force by a police officer is governed by General Statutes §53a-22. The version of that statute in effect on May 16, 2024, in relevant part, provides:

(b) [A] peace officer . . . is justified in using physical force upon another person when and to the extent that he or she reasonably believes such use to be necessary to: (1) Effect an arrest or prevent the escape from custody of a person whom he or she reasonably believes to have

committed an offense, unless he or she knows that the arrest or custody is unauthorized; or (2) defend himself or herself or a third person from the use or imminent use of physical force while effecting or attempting to effect an arrest or while preventing or attempting to prevent an escape.

(c) (1) . . . a peace officer . . . is justified in using *deadly physical force* upon another person for the purposes specified in subsection (b) of this section only when his or her actions are objectively reasonable under the circumstances, and:

(A) He or she reasonably believes such to be necessary to defend himself or herself or a third person from the use or imminent use of deadly physical force; or

(B) He or she (i) has reasonably determined that there are no available reasonable alternatives to the use of deadly physical force, (ii) reasonably believes that the force employed creates no unreasonable risk of injury to a third party, and (iii) reasonably believes such force is necessary to (I) effect an arrest of a person whom he or she reasonably believes has committed or attempted to commit a felony that involved the infliction of serious physical injury, and if, where feasible, he or she has given warning of his or her intent to use deadly force” (Emphasis added).

The statute further provides:

“For the purpose of evaluating whether the actions of a peace officer . . . are reasonable under subdivision (1) of this subsection, factors to be considered include, but are not limited to, whether (A) the person upon whom deadly force was used possessed or appeared to possess a deadly weapon, (B) the peace officer . . . engaged in reasonable de-escalation measures prior to using deadly physical force, and (C) any unreasonable conduct of the peace officer . . . led to an increased risk of an occurrence of the situation that precipitated the use of force.” §53a-22(c)(2).

Accordingly, a police officer is justified in using deadly physical force upon another person when the officer reasonably believes such force to be necessary to defend the officer or a third person from the use or imminent use of deadly physical force. “Deadly physical force” means “physical force that can be reasonably expected to cause death or serious physical injury.” General Statutes § 53a-3(5). “Serious physical injury” means “physical injury which creates a substantial risk of death, or which causes serious disfigurement, serious impairment of health or serious loss or impairment of the function of any bodily organ.” General Statutes §53a-3(4).

A police officer is also justified in deadly force to when he or she reasonably believes such force is necessary to arrest a person whom the officer reasonably believes has committed a felony that involved the infliction of serious physical injury, provided there are no reasonable alternatives to the use of deadly force, the force employed creates no unreasonable risk of injury to a third party, and, where feasible, the officer has given warning of the intent to use deadly force.

The reasonableness of a police officer's belief under § 53a-22 is evaluated pursuant to a subjective-objective formulation. *State v. Smith*, 73 Conn. App. 173, 185, 807 A.2d 500, cert. denied 262 Conn. 923, 812 A.2d 865 (2002). Under this test, the first question is whether, on the basis of all of the evidence, the police officer in fact honestly believed that deadly force was necessary to defend himself/herself or a third person. *Id.* If it is determined that the police officer honestly believed that deadly force was necessary, the second part of the test asks whether the police officer's honest belief was reasonable from the perspective of a reasonable police officer in the officer's circumstances. *Id.* at 198.

The United States Supreme Court has explained this test as follows: "The reasonableness' of a particular use of force must be judged from the perspective of a reasonable officer on scene rather than with the 20/20 vision of hindsight. . . . [T]he calculus of reasonableness must embody allowance of the fact that police officers are often forced to make split-second decisions—in circumstances that are tense, uncertain, and rapidly evolving—about the amount of force that is necessary in a particular situation." *Graham v. Connor*, 490 U.S. 386, 396-97, 109 S. Ct. 1865, 104 L. Ed. 2d 443 (1989).

ANALYSIS

Under Connecticut law as applicable here, a determination as to whether a police officer's use of deadly force was objectively reasonable requires, in part, consideration of four questions:

1. Did the officer, as a matter of fact, actually – that is honestly and sincerely – believe that he/she or a third person was facing either the actual or imminent use of deadly force when the officer used deadly force?
2. Was that actual belief reasonable in the sense that a reasonable police officer in the officer's circumstances at the time of the officer's actions, viewing those circumstances from the officer's point of view, would have shared that belief?

3. Did the officer, as a matter of fact, actually – that is honestly and sincerely – believe that the use of deadly force was necessary to defend himself/herself or a third person from such threat?

4. Was that actual belief reasonable, in the sense that a reasonable police officer in the officer's circumstances at the time of the officer's actions, viewing those circumstances from the officer's point of view, would share the belief that deadly force was necessary?

Additionally, the reasonableness of the officer's conduct also turns on whether (1) the other person possessed a deadly weapon (or appeared to), (2) the officer attempted reasonable de-escalation measures, and (3) the situation was not precipitated by the officer's own conduct.

Officer Colon honestly and sincerely believed that Stephenson was about to inflict serious physical harm to him by sprinting at him with two large knives raised about his head in a menacing fashion. Any reasonable police officer under the totality of the circumstances would have believed the same. Officer Colon honestly and sincerely believed that the use of deadly physical force was necessary when Stephenson closed to within five feet of him with knives poised to stab him. A reasonable police officer, under the circumstances thrust upon Officer Colon, would undoubtedly have shared the belief that the use of deadly physical force was necessary to protect himself from serious physical injury or death.

In sum, there is simply no doubt that this was a legally justified shooting. Officer Colon arrived at the scene and almost instantaneously was charged at by a person wielding knives in both hands. He had no time to retreat or to attempt de-escalation strategies. He did not have other officers in a position to protect him if he were to try safely to use non-lethal force against Stephenson. Nor did he realistically have enough time to do so. He played no role in creating the necessity for the use of deadly physical force. The potentially deadly situation was upon him immediately after he stepped out of his cruiser, and he was justified in using deadly physical force to protect himself.

CONCLUSION

Under the totality of the circumstances, I therefore conclude that the use of deadly physical force by Officer Israel Colon was justified under Connecticut law. Accordingly, my office will take no further action on this matter.

August 25th, 2025



ELIOT D. PRESCOTT
INSPECTOR GENERAL