



PUBLIC STATEMENT

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GRAND JURY FINDS PATERSON POLICE OFFICER'S USE OF NON-FATAL DEADLY FORCE WAS JUSTIFIED

PATERSON, NEW JERSEY:

August 23, 2019

Passaic County Prosecutor Camelia M. Valdes issues a public statement regarding the outcome of an investigation into the discharge of a firearm by a Paterson Police Officer. This statement is issued in accordance with the independent prosecutor directive entitled "July 28, 2015, Supplemental Law Enforcement Directive Amending Attorney General Law Enforcement Directive 2006-5."

On September 7, 2018, Paterson Police Officer Joel Santiago discharged his service weapon while on duty. An investigation by the Passaic County Prosecutor's Office Shooting Response Team commenced. A comprehensive conflicts inquiry required pursuant to section 3 of the Supplemental Law Enforcement Directive was conducted and no conflicts were detected. The matter was reviewed by the County Prosecutor and complied with all relevant provisions of the Supplemental Law Enforcement Directive.

The Passaic County Prosecutor's Office Shooting Response Team conducted an investigation that included neighborhood canvassing, civilian and police witness statements, review of video footage, review of 911 and radio transmissions, collection of physical evidence, and review of medical records.

The results of the investigation were presented to a Grand Jury in Passaic County and the Grand Jury found Officer Santiago's use of force to be justified.

The police-involved shooting occurred in the area of the Madison Avenue bridge, where it crosses over Route 80, in the City of Paterson, shortly before 7:30 p.m. on Friday, September 7, 2018. The investigation revealed that the Paterson

Police Department was conducting a traffic enforcement operation at that location and issuing summonses to drivers for motor vehicle infractions. Police attempted to pull over a white Dodge Charger with tinted windows and temporary license plates. Despite numerous verbal commands from the uniformed officers on the scene, the car did not stop. Officer Santiago was in the path of the oncoming vehicle. Officer Santiago used verbal commands and hand gestures in an attempt to stop the vehicle. The vehicle continued forward, striking Officer Santiago in the legs and causing him to back up several feet. When the car accelerated forward, it struck Officer Santiago in the knee. Officer Santiago discharged his department-issued firearm two times, striking the passenger side of the vehicle. The vehicle drove over a center median and drove away from the police in the opposite direction of traffic. The vehicle was located, unoccupied and running, a short distance from the scene. Officer Santiago was treated at a local hospital for his injuries and released. No civilian injuries were reported.

The investigation identified the driver of the Dodge Charger as Jaquan Taylor, of Paterson, New Jersey. On April 12, 2019, Jaquan Taylor pleaded guilty to both counts of Accusation 19-04-0410-A, charging him with second degree Eluding, in violation of N.J.S. 2C:29-2b, and third degree Aggravated Assault on a Law Enforcement Officer, in violation of N.J.S. 2C:12-1b5. On May 10, 2019, the Honorable Barbara Buono Stanton, Judge of the Superior Court, sentenced Jaquan Taylor to four years in New Jersey State Prison on Accusation 19-04-0410-A.

A law enacted in January 2019 requires that the Attorney General's Office conduct investigations of a person's death that occurs during an encounter with a law enforcement officer acting in the officer's official capacity or while the decedent is in custody. This deadly force investigation preceded enactment of that law, and did not result in death, therefore the investigation was conducted by the PCPO and reviewed by the Attorney General's Office in accordance with the Directive, which establishes strict procedures for conducting such investigations. This statement was prepared and disseminated to the public in accordance with section 8 of the Directive.

Further information on the July 28, 2015, Supplemental Law Enforcement Directive Amending Attorney General Law Enforcement Directive 2006-5 may be found at: http://www.state.nj.us/lps/dcj/agguide/directives/2006-5_SRT_OIS.pdf.