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DEADLY FORCE REVIEW PANEL

6 STATE HOUSE STATION · AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333

March 30, 2026

The Hon. Anne M. Carney, Senate Chair
The Hon. Amy D. Kuhn, House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Sen. Carney, Rep. Kuhn, and Members of the Committee on Judiciary:

The Deadly Force Review Panel completed its 49th review of a law enforcement officer's use of deadly force. Under Title 5, section 200(K)(7), “within 30 days of the conclusion of the examination of the use of deadly force by a law enforcement officer . . . the panel shall submit a report on the panel's activities, conclusions, and recommendations about the incident to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over judiciary matters.” The report is enclosed.

The Panel reviews incidents of deadly force by law enforcement in the same chronological order in which the Attorney General disseminates a report on the legality of the use of deadly force. The Panel examined the June 7, 2024, incident in Hiram, the details of which are included in the Panel’s enclosed report.

For the Deadly Force Review Panel:

Stephen Burlock, Chair
Benjamin Strick, Vice Chair

Enclosure

cc:

Criminal Justice & Public Safety Committee
Health & Human Services Committee

June 7, 2024 – Hiram Use of Deadly Force Incident

As required by 5 M.R.S. § 200-K, the Maine Deadly Force Review Panel submits the following report of the use of deadly force incident in Hiram on June 7, 2024, involving Trooper Zachary Fancy of the State Police, which resulted in the death of Steven Nelson, age 39. By statute, after the release of the report of the Attorney General, the Panel shall examine deaths or serious injuries resulting from the use of deadly force by a law enforcement officer. The purpose of the examination is to find independently whether there was compliance with accepted and best practices under the circumstances or whether the practices require adjustment or improvement. The Panel may recommend methods to improve standards, including changes to statutes, rules, training, and policies and procedures, to ensure best practices that promote increased public and officer safety. It should be noted that the Panel's "Observations" are case-specific bullet points that have been pulled directly from the incident case file and are primarily intended to highlight key pieces of information. The Panel's "Recommendations" should be viewed as potential system-level issues to consider during future critical incidents. The Panel is not charged with undertaking a *de novo* review of the Attorney General's determination regarding the legality of the use of deadly force by law enforcement; discussions and recommendations of the Panel are independent of the Attorney General.

Synopsis

Early on the morning of Friday, June 7, 2024, Steven Nelson's girlfriend arrived at his home after going out with friends. Mr. Nelson, reportedly high on methamphetamine, was belligerent toward her and accused her of sleeping with other men. He became violent, smashing windows and furniture, throwing objects, punching her in the face, and threatening to kill her, the police, and himself. Mr. Nelson grabbed a gun, using it to threaten his girlfriend and shoot out all the windows of his house. The girlfriend messaged a friend about what was happening and asked the friend to call the police. State Police Trooper Zachary Fancy responded. When he arrived, he tried to de-escalate Mr. Nelson with verbal commands, but Mr. Nelson was uncooperative. Inside the residence, Mr. Nelson raised his gun at Trooper Fancy. The trooper fired one shot, killing Mr. Nelson.

Information the Panel Reviewed

Before its February 26, 2026, meeting, the Panel members received the investigative materials compiled by the Attorney General. The materials included all the original investigative data, such as interview recordings, reports, forensic reports, photographs, emergency communications, and other relevant items. The Panel also reviewed the Attorney General's January 13, 2025, report and the Internal Review Team's report dated April 4, 2025.

Panel Discussion

On February 26, 2026, the Panel met via Zoom to review and discuss the referenced incident. There was discussion about the officer's decision to switch from a weapon to a taser and back to a weapon, the officer's quick shift to providing medical care after the incident, and

the officer's efforts to support the domestic violence victim. Recommendations discussed included access to body cameras, regulating the appearance of toy weapons, and increasing resources available to victims and bystanders.

Case Specific Observations

1. The 39-year-old suspect involved in this incident had an extensive criminal history with multiple convictions dating back to November 2011. His record included convictions for assault and refusing to submit to Arrest.
2. The postmortem toxicology report identified multiple substances, including methamphetamine, which tested high at 740 ng/mL. This report notes that blood levels of 200-600 ng/mL have been linked to violent and irrational behavior, and high doses can also cause restlessness, confusion, and hallucinations.
3. The suspect was reportedly estranged from his family.
4. The trooper's repeated commands for the suspect to put his gun down, along with the suspect's statements to the trooper to "shoot me," were recorded on the trooper's Watchguard audio device. The trooper was not wearing a body camera because the State Police had not yet adopted the use of body cameras.
5. Following the use of deadly force, it was found that the suspect's displayed weapon was a CO2 BB handgun, which resembled the trooper's .45 caliber semi-automatic pistol.
6. The Panel commends Trooper Fancy for parking out of view of the residence and entering unannounced for safety reasons and to help the victim. His quick transition after using deadly force to give medical aid to Mr. Nelson and his engagement with the domestic violence victim are commendable. Trooper Fancy's calm handling of the situation, without help or immediate backup, was impressive.
7. The department-issued hollow-point ammunition did not perform as expected. Hollow point ammunition features a cavity in the tip of the projectile designed to expand upon impact with a soft target. When striking a target, soft tissue enters the projectile's hollow cavity, causing the projectile's sides to peel back and expand. This expansion increases the diameter, intended in part to reduce the risk of over-penetration and to protect bystanders. In this case, the projectile did not expand.

System Level Recommendations

1. As noted in the Panel's Sixth Annual Report, cruiser video/audio and/or body cameras should be mandatory equipment for all law enforcement agencies statewide. The Panel

has learned that the State Police currently use body cameras, in addition to the cruiser audio/video system, which this agency has used for years.

2. The panel recommends the analysis of bullets/projectiles whenever the performance is inconsistent with expectations. Given the frequent involvement of the Office of Chief Medical Examiner, that office should forward recovered bullets to the Crime Lab for analysis. The Crime Lab should maintain records of ammunition performance.

Factual Summary

On Friday, June 7, 2024, at 3:47 a.m., a woman called 911 and reported that her friend was being assaulted by the friend's boyfriend, Steven Nelson, age 39, at Mr. Nelson's residence in Hiram. The caller reported Mr. Nelson was "whacking" the girlfriend in the face and yelling at her. The residence was a ranch-style home at the end of a short, dead-end road. There was a dirt driveway leading up to the left side of the residence. It was dark and rainy out.

Trooper Fancy arrived at 4:31 a.m. and parked on the street at the end of the driveway. He could see silhouettes in the front window of Mr. Nelson's residence and could hear yelling coming from inside the residence. Trooper Fancy walked up the driveway, saw a front window smashed out, and continued to hear yelling coming from inside. Trooper Fancy had been to the residence before and knew that the door on the left side of the porch was the main entrance and exit. He noticed that the door was open. He entered the residence through the open door and saw broken dishes and cabinets, and a smashed television on the kitchen floor. When he was about ten feet inside the house, he drew his handgun and activated its flashlight. He announced himself. Trooper Fancy waited until after he entered to announce himself because he was trying to listen and did not want to make an initial announcement that might prompt Mr. Nelson to react adversely.

Trooper Fancy saw Mr. Nelson at a bedroom door down the hallway and instructed him to come out. Mr. Nelson, who had nothing in his hands at that time, went back into the bedroom. Trooper Fancy holstered his gun and transitioned to his taser. With his taser at the ready, he continued to order Mr. Nelson to come out. Mr. Nelson shouted an expletive and said no. Trooper Fancy looked into the room and saw the girlfriend in the fetal position on a mattress. She was crying and clearly in distress. Mr. Nelson was standing next to the mattress, about three feet from Trooper Fancy, holding a black handgun in his right hand. Trooper Fancy quickly retreated from the room and transitioned to his handgun. He ordered Mr. Nelson to drop the gun. Nelson yelled, "No! Shoot me!" Mr. Nelson then moved to another bedroom. Trooper Fancy was in the hallway approximately 20 feet away, yelling commands for Mr. Nelson to drop the gun. Mr. Nelson, standing in the doorway, raised the gun towards Trooper Fancy. Trooper Fancy fired one round from 20 feet away, killing Nelson.

During this confrontation, Trooper Fancy ordered Mr. Nelson nine times to come out and five times to put the gun down. Two minutes and seventeen seconds passed from the time of Trooper Fancy's arrival to the time of the shot.

A postmortem examination and autopsy conducted by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner determined that Mr. Nelson's cause of death was a through-and-through gunshot wound to the arm that entered the torso and resulted in fatal injuries to the lungs, the heart, and the esophagus. A toxicology examination revealed elevated levels of methamphetamine and amphetamine in Mr. Nelson's system.

Panel Members

Stephen Burlock, Esq., Assistant District Attorney (Retired), Chair
Benjamin Strick, Vice President of Adult Behavioral Health, Spurwink, Vice Chair
Michael Alpert, Greater Bangor Area Branch NAACP
John Chapman, Esq.
Jack Clements, Chief of Police, Saco
Sandra Slemmer, designee of Alice J. Briones, D.O., Chief Medical Examiner
Anna Love, Chief, Attorney General Investigations
Joel Merry, Sheriff, Sagadahoc County
Joshua Daley, designee of Lincoln Ryder, Director, Maine Criminal Justice Academy
Michael Sauschuck, Commissioner, Department of Public Safety
Fernand LaRochelle, Citizen Member

Volunteer Staff: Brian MacMaster (Retired Chief of Attorney General Investigations)

Note: The individuals serving on the Panel are appointed to apply their professional expertise to discussions of these complex cases. Therefore, members of the Panel may be familiar with or have contact with individuals involved in the case under review. In such cases, members must report these affiliations to the Panel, and this information is recorded in the meeting minutes. If panel members decide they have a conflict of interest, they are excused from voting on the panel's findings and recommendations for that case.