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January 8, 2026

Sheriff Donny Youngblood
Kern County Sheriff's Office
1350 Norris Road
Bakersfield, CA 93308

**Re: KCSO Officer-Involved Shooting of Joshua Pritchard on April 17, 2025
Kern County Sheriff's Deputies Brandon Hicks, Oscar Artiga, and Jose Chavez
1101 East Belle Terrace, Bakersfield, CA
Documented in KCSO Report 2025-00047067**

Dear Sheriff Youngblood,

The Kern County District Attorney's Officer-Involved Shooting Committee has reviewed the reports and other materials submitted by your agency regarding the shooting noted above. The Officer Involved Shooting Committee reviews cases for criminal liability under state law. The Committee has completed its review. The findings are noted below.

Summary

On April 14, 2025, 911 Dispatch received a call reporting that Joshua Pritchard had returned to his sister's residence and was threatening her. It was reported that Mr. Pritchard had stabbed his sister several times on a previous occasion and had an active felony warrant for attempted murder. His sister called to report that Mr. Pritchard was by her house and she was scared he was there to attack her again. Deputies were dispatched to her apartments to apprehend Mr. Pritchard. While enroute Deputy Brandon Hicks contacted Mr. Pritchard's sister, the reporting party, and was informed that he had left the area and was at Belle Terrace Park by the baseball diamonds. Deputies then responded to Belle Terrace Park.

When Deputies initially arrived at Belle Terrace Park they went to the east side of the park near the sump. At that time, they observed Mr. Pritchard from a distance across the sump near some trees. Deputy Chavez, Deputy Oscar Artiga, and his trainee, Deputy Gutierrez, responded to the west side of the sump by the trees to contact Mr. Pritchard. Deputy Hicks arrived shortly after and assisted the other deputies in making contact with Mr. Pritchard. Mr. Pritchard immediately resisted from the outset which led to deputies giving multiple verbal commands to get on the ground, to show his hands, to take his hands out

of his pocket, and to quit reaching. At the same time the deputies were giving him commands, Mr. Pritchard walked along the fence line and actively resisted deputies and refused to comply with their commands. All four of the deputies who contacted Mr. Pritchard verbally warned him to stop and get on the ground several times. Deputy Artiga warned him that if he did not listen, he would be tazed and another deputy warned he would be shot.

While Mr. Pritchard actively resisting commands from deputies, Deputy Hicks approached Mr. Pritchard to attempt to grab his arm and go “hands on.” As Deputy Hicks moved toward Mr. Pritchard, Mr. Pritchard pulled a large, fixed blade knife out from his sweatshirt and swung the knife towards Deputy Artiga and then swung it at Deputy Hicks. Deputy Chavez saw the knife and yelled, “Knife! Knife! Knife!” When the knife was pulled out by Mr. Pritchard, all the deputies that fired their weapon were within 2-5 feet of the knife. Once the deputies realized he had a knife and he swung it at deputies, Deputy Hicks, Artiga, and Chavez fired their duty weapons and struck Mr. Pritchard, causing him to fall to the ground. Deputy Gutierrez did not discharge his firearm. All deputies who fired their weapons stopped firing when Mr. Pritchard was lying on the ground and the knife was no longer in his hand. Once there was no longer a threat, deputies approached Mr. Pritchard and observed big black buck knife laying on Mr. Pritchard’s chest. Medical aid was immediately rendered; however Mr. Pritchard was pronounced deceased at the scene.

Legal Principles and Analysis

In this case, Deputy Chavez, Deputy Artiga, and Deputy Hicks used deadly force in response to the perceived threat Joshua Pritchard posed to the deputies’ lives. A peace officer includes any deputy sheriff of a city or county, who is employed in that capacity (Penal Code section 830.1). That peace officer’s authority extends to any place in the state where any public offense is committed in the peace officer’s presence and with respect to which there is immediate danger to person or property or of the escape of the perpetrator of the offense (Penal Code section 830.1(3)). Deputy Chavez, Artiga, and Hicks are deputy sheriffs employed as such for the County of Kern. Thus, they are a peace officer within the meaning of Penal Code section 830.1. In the present case, Joshua Pritchard actively resisted arrest and failed to comply with several deputies’ commands to stop, get on the ground, take his hands out of his pockets, and stop reaching. Instead, Mr. Pritchard pulled out a very large, fixed blade knife and swung it towards Deputy Artiga and Deputy Hicks. As Mr. Pritchard swung the knife at deputies, he came within inches of stabbing at least two deputies with the knife.

Deputy Chavez, Deputy Artiga, and Deputy Hicks were acting as peace officers and were on duty as peace officers at the time of the incident, their conduct is judged by the same standard used for all peace officers. An officer with reasonable cause to believe a crime is committed or a person is a danger to others may use reasonable force to affect arrest or detention, to prevent escape, or to overcome resistance. *Tennessee v. Garner* (1985) 471 U.S. 1; *Graham v. Connor* (1989) 490 U.S. 386; *see also* Penal Code section 835a(b). An officer may use deadly force upon another person only when the officer reasonably believes, based on the totality of the circumstances, that such force is necessary to defend against an imminent threat of death or serious bodily injury to the officer or another person. (CA Penal Code section 835(c)(1)(A)).

In deciding whether an officer who fired his or her weapon did so lawfully, one must consider what a reasonable person would have done in a similar situation with similar knowledge and experience. One must decide whether the officers’ beliefs and actions were objectively reasonable under all of the circumstances known to him or her, as they appeared at the time. “The calculus of reasonableness must embody allowance for the fact that peace 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*, supra at pp.396-397. For the use of deadly force to be "objectively reasonable," the officers must have probable cause to believe that the suspect posed a significant threat of death or serious physical injury to an officer or others. The law does not impose a duty to use less lethal options. "Where the peril is swift and imminent and the necessity for action is immediate, the law does not weigh into nice scales the conduct of the assailed and say he shall not be justified in killing because he might have resorted to other means to secure his safety." (*People v. Collins* (1961) 189 Cal.App.2d 575, 589.) A peace officer threatened with an attack that justifies the exercise of the right of self-defense need not retreat. In the exercise of his right of self-defense a person may stand his ground and defend himself by use of force and means which would appear to be necessary to a reasonable person in a similar situation and with similar knowledge.

In this case, when deputies arrived at the park, they were already aware that Mr. Pritchard had an active arrest warrant for attempted murder. They were also aware that Mr. Pritchard had returned to his victim's residence and had threatened her. When contacted in the park by deputies, Mr. Pritchard was extremely aggressive and actively resisted arrest and ignored commands. When Deputy Hicks attempted to grab Mr. Pritchard's arm to administer a control hold, Mr. Pritchard pulled out his large knife and swung it at Deputy Artiga and then at Deputy Hicks, putting both of their lives in danger. Deputy Chavez saw the knife and yelled out to warn the other deputies. Upon seeing the knife and it being swung at the deputies, Deputy Chavez, Deputy Artiga, and Deputy Hicks believed Mr. Pritchard was a threat to themselves, other deputies and possibly other civilians if he continued to flee. Thus, based on their observations and the actions of Mr. Pritchard it was reasonable for Deputy Chavez, Deputy Artiga, and Deputy Hicks to believe that Mr. Pritchard was a deadly threat to themselves, other deputies, and to civilians.

Conclusion

Based upon a review of the evidence submitted by the Kern County Sheriff's Office, Deputy Chavez, Deputy Artiga, and Deputy Hicks all responded reasonably in self-defense and defense of others to defend against an imminent threat of death or serious bodily injury posed by Joshua Pritchard. There is no state criminal liability for their use of deadly force under the circumstances of this case, and the shooting is legally justified.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cynthia J. Zimmer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cynthia J. Zimmer
District Attorney