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January 23, 2026

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

Re: KCSO Officer-Involved Shooting of Raul Candido on February 4, 2025.
Kern County Sheriff's Deputy Joel Stapley
6433 East Brundage Lane, Bakersfield, CA
Documented in KCSO Report 2025-00015848

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 February 4, 2025, Air One located a possible stolen vehicle utilizing an automatic license plate reader in East Bakersfield. The possible stolen vehicle's description was broadcast to patrol deputies in the area. Deputy Villa responded to the area where the stolen vehicle was seen by Air One. A tan pickup truck was confirmed to be a stolen vehicle, so Deputy Villa attempted to conduct an enforcement stop. The pickup failed to yield, and a vehicle pursuit began. The pickup was occupied by two people. The driver, who was later identified as Raul Candido and the passenger, Stephen Romo. The pursuit proceeded eastbound on Edison Highway towards Fairfax Road. At one point during the pursuit, the pickup turned off its lights and drove in the dark while committing several vehicle code violations like speeding, running a red light, and driving on the wrong side of the road into oncoming traffic. During the pursuit the suspect vehicle entered a dirt field at a high rate of speed and continued to evade deputies. Due to safety concerns, the patrol vehicles in pursuit could not follow the pickup into the dirt field so, Air One continued to follow the suspect vehicle from overhead. The pursuit continued onto westbound Highway 58. The suspect vehicle exited at Fairfax Road and crashed shortly after exiting the highway. Both Raul Candido and Stephen Romo fled from the pickup on foot in a northbound direction.

At the time of the pursuit, Deputy Joel Stapley was on duty and partnered with his Field Training Officer, Max Mendoza. They were patrolling in the area and traveled parallel to the pursuit as it was broadcast by Air One and other deputies. Deputy Stapley and Mendoza were in the area Fairfax Road and Brundage Lane, heading in a southbound direction, when they observed the suspect vehicle exit westbound Highway 58 and crash into a parking lot wall. Deputy Stapley was driving the patrol vehicle and Deputy Mendoza was in the front passenger seat. As Deputies Stapley and Mendoza arrived where the pickup had crashed, they activated their patrol lights and pulled into the parking lot and came to a stop. The two occupants of the crashed vehicle, Raul Candido and Stephen Romo, were now on foot and running towards Deputy Stapley and Deputy Mendoza as they were exiting their patrol vehicle. Deputy Stapley exited his driver side door first. Deputy Mendoza followed and exited the passenger side and ran in a southeast direction to make contact with the fleeing individuals.

Once outside of his patrol vehicle, Deputy Stapley initially did not know where the two people from the pickup were. He then saw both Raul Candido and Stephen Romo quickly running towards him. At this time Deputy Stapley's firearm was drawn and pointed in a southeastern direction. According to witnesses, the area where Deputy Stapley first saw two people running towards him was in a dirt area next to Fairfax Road and the parking lot. The area was not well lit, there was a tree and a wall blocking surrounding available light. Romo was running ahead of Candido; however, they were both running in a northeast direction. Shortly after exiting his patrol vehicle and seeing Candido, Deputy Stapley made an order to "get the fuck on the ground".

When Deputy Stapley ordered Mr. Candido to get on the ground, he was approximately 30 feet away and running in his direction. At this time Deputy Stapley saw Raul Candido reaching for his waistband with his right hand instead of getting on the ground as instructed. Raul Candido continued to run towards Deputy Stapley as he reached for his waistband and ignored commands. Upon Deputy Stapley seeing Candido reach for his waistband and continue to run towards him he discharged his weapon in a southern direction towards Candido. Raul Candido was not hit by the gunshot and immediately turned around to continue to flee from Deputy Stapley in a southwestern direction. He was later apprehended by other deputies after a short foot pursuit. After he was arrested, Raul Candido was searched and a folded pocketknife was found in his pant's pocket along with a screwdriver in his front sweatshirt pocket.

Legal Principles and Analysis

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 Stapley is a deputy sheriff employed as such for the County of Kern. Thus, he is a peace officer within the meaning of Penal Code section 830.1. In this case, Deputy Stapley stated that he believed that Mr. Candido was reaching for what could have been a firearm or knife. Deputy Stapley stated as Mr. Candido reached for his waistband he was running towards him. Deputy Stapley stated he knew Mr. Candido was actively recklessly evading law enforcement and disobeying commands when he encountered Mr. Candido as he fled from the stolen pickup.

Since Deputy Stapley was acting as a peace officer and was on duty as a peace officer at the time of the incident, his 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*

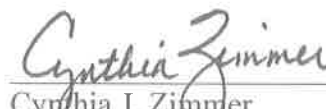
(1985) 471 U.S. 1; *Graham v. Connor* (1989) 490 U.S. 386; *see also* Penal Code section 835a(b). An officer may use deadly force upon another person only when the officer reasonably believes, based on the totality of the circumstances, that such force is necessary to defend against an imminent threat of death or serious bodily injury to the officer or another person. (CA Penal Code section 835(c)(1)(A)). When evaluating the use of deadly force, one must decide whether the officers' beliefs and actions were objectively reasonable under all 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.

The law does not impose a duty to use less lethal options. "Requiring officers to find and choose the least intrusive alternative would require them to exercise superhuman judgment. In the heat of battle with lives potentially in the balance, an officer would not be able to rely on training and common sense to decide what would best accomplish his mission. Instead, he would need to ascertain the least intrusive alternative (an inherently subjective determination) and choose that option and that option only. Imposing such a requirement would inevitably induce tentativeness by officers, and thus deter police from protecting the public and themselves." *Scott v. Henrich* (9th Cir. 1994) 39 F.3d 912, 915). The appearance of danger is all that is necessary; actual danger is not. *People v. Toledo* (1948) 85 Cal.App.2d 369 (*overruled on other grounds*); *People v. Jackson* (1965) 233 Cal.App.2d 639. "The 'reasonableness' of a particular use of force must be judged from the perspective of a reasonable officer on the scene rather than with the 20/20 vision of hindsight." *Graham v. Connor*, *supra*, 490 at p. 396.

Conclusion

Based upon a review of the evidence submitted by the Kern County Sheriff's Office, there is insufficient evidence to establish beyond a reasonable doubt that Deputy Joel Stapley did not reasonably respond in self-defense based upon all the facts known to him at the time he fired his weapon. A criminal prosecution requires proof beyond a reasonable doubt that the shooting was not done in lawful self-defense or defense of others. Because the evidence is insufficient to warrant a criminal conviction, no state criminal charges will be filed pertaining to the use of deadly force during this incident.

Sincerely,


Cynthia J. Zimmer
District Attorney