STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF ATTORNEY GENERAL

DANA NESSEL
ATTORNEY GENERAL

MEMORANDUM

Warrant Denial Memorandum

September 26, 2025

TO: Danielle Hagaman-Clark
Bureau Chief
Criminal Justice Bureau

Robyn Liddell
Division Chief
Criminal Trials Division

CC: Oronde Patterson
First Assistant

APPROVED: Danielle Hagaman-Clark 10/15/2025
Bureau Chief Date

☐ Check here when Division Chief has final approval authority for the request.

APPROVED: Robyn Liddell 10-2-25
Division Chief Date

FROM: Stine Grand
Assistant Attorney General
Criminal Trials Division

RE: **Request for Authority to Deny Criminal Charges**
Due Date for Response: October 15, 2025
Tpr. Justin Cope Officer Involved Shooting
AG No. 2025-0432765-A

I. Introduction:

On May 16, 2025 Michigan State Police Trooper Justin Cope (Tpr Cope) initiated a traffic stop at 19:50:36 on a white Chevy truck on the exit ramp of M-10 and Wyoming Avenue. The driver and sole occupant of the vehicle was Stephen Wangara-Mason (Mason). As Mason exited the driver's side of the vehicle Tpr. Cope asks, "What are you reaching for?". (Tpr. Cope BWC video 19:51:59). At that moment a revolver falls from his right waist-lap area to the ground and is captured on Tpr. Cope's dashcam video.

[redacted]

Mason immediately lunged down, reaching with his left hand for the handgun he dropped while Tpr. Cope attempts to stop him from gaining access to the firearm. Almost immediately Tpr. Cope's BWC falls off his torso and is pointed up in the air for the remainder of the incident. Mason and Tpr. Cope are struggling in the street, wrestling as Tpr. Cope tries to control Mason's arm and hand movements, but Mason manages to reacquire his handgun. Mason then shoots Tpr. Cope three times, twice at point blank range in the chest and once in the clavicle at 19:52:46, 19:52:47 and 19:52:50 (the shot order is uncertain). The two bullets to the chest do not penetrate Tpr. Cope's body because of his bullet proof vest, but they cause his body injury and bleed through his uniform shirts, the bullet to his right clavicle penetrates his body and causes more injury and needs to be surgically removed.

After he is shot Tpr. Cope continues to fight Mason in the middle of the M-10 service drive. Mason continues to try to shoot Tpr. Cope with the remaining live rounds in his revolver. Eventually Tpr. Cope ends up straddling Mason's waist and sitting on Mason while Tpr. Cope attempts to draw his sidearm with his right hand while Mason grips Tpr. Cope's right wrist preventing Tpr. Cope from pulling his weapon from its holster. Tpr. Cope appears to be holding Mason's left wrist/forearm area to prevent Mason from shooting him again as Mason still has the firearm in his right hand. (Tpr. Cope dashcam 19:52:57; see also Tpr. Cope's BWC at 19:53:04).

Mason rolls Tpr. Cope off him a bit so Tpr. Cope tries to stand but is still hunched over Mason as Tpr. Cope's radio cord is caught under Mason. Tpr. Cope is tethered to Mason and cannot get away from him, but he is able to break Mason's grip on his right wrist at 19:53:13. With their bodies still locked in conflict mere inches apart, Mason is reaching up towards Tpr. Cope's hands but exactly where is unclear as at that second the dash cam video recording the fight is behind Tpr. Cope so the view is obstructed as to what Mason is doing when reaching up towards Tpr. Cope with his left hand (that same left hand was one earlier holding Tpr. Cope's right wrist preventing Tpr. Cope from pulling his weapon from its holster). Tpr. Cope's left arm is down towards Mason's right arm/hand area where Mason still is holding his firearm but again the angle of Mason's hand and his firearm is blocked. It is at that moment that Tpr. Cope fires his first shot at Mason at 19:53:14. The second and third shot come at less than a second apart at 19:53:15 as Tpr. Cope is trying to get away from Mason but Tpr. Cope is unsuccessful in extricating himself from Mason. Tpr. Cope cannot get away from Mason as Mason is lying on Tpr. Cope's radio cord which is affixed to Tpr. Cope's body, and it is pulling Tpr. Cope forward; it takes Tpr. Cope nearly 15 seconds to extricate himself from Mason. (Tpr. Cope dashcam 19:53:29). Before he is able to detach himself from Mason, Tpr. Cope while still leaning down close to Mason calls in on his radio "Shots fired. I'm hit". (Tpr. Cope BWC 19:53:20).

As Tpr. Cope is trying to disentangle himself and get his radio cord out from under Mason, Tpr. Cope raises Mason's right wrist and clutched in Mason's right hand is Mason's firearm (Tpr. Cope dashcam 19:53:23). The firearm drops to the street and Tpr. Cope kicks the gun away from Mason twice (initially); the sound of Tpr. Cope

kicking Mason's firearm and it skittering along the pavement can be heard on his BWC at 19:53:32.

At 19:53:36 a civilian, [redacted], who saw most of the fight, approached Tpr. Cope immediately after the shooting finished. When [redacted] asked, "You all right?", Tpr. Cope responded, "I'm hit! I'm hit!", and then "I'm hit multiple times!" as Tpr. Cope was pacing around, seeming to rnn on adrenaline and sounding breathless (it was less than one minute since Tpr. Cope had been shot three times and was fighting for his life). After looking at the condition of Mason at 19:53:56 Tpr. Cope calls in on his radio "Suspects down. I'm hit". The response he received was that 'EMS was on the way'. Mason is not moving on the ground.

Less than two minntes later Detroit Police Department officers arrived on scene and Tpr. Cope was loaded into one of their vehicles and transported to [redacted] Hospital. Immediately after he was shot Mason was not moving or breathing on Tpr. Cope's dashcam video. Six minutes after the shooting EMS arrived at 19:59 and their notes state Mason was "obviously dead so no resuscitation was attempted". Stephen Wangara-Mason died on the M-10 service drive next to his truck from the gunshot wounds fired from Tpr. Cope's service weapon.

The Detroit Police Department Homicide Task Force with the assistance of the Michigan State Police Special Investigation Section 2nd District investigated this incident and snbmitted the results of that investigation to the Michigan Department of Attorney General. After a review of all the evidence submitted no charges are appropriate because the State would not be able to prove that Trooper Justin Cope's use of deadly force was not justified under the law in that the State would not be able to prove that he was not firing in self-defense and defense of others.

II. Recommendation:

No charges can be issued against Michigan State Police Trooper Justin Cope from this incident.

III. Venue City of Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan.

IV. Facts

On May 16, 2025 Justin Cope, a [redacted] Michigan State Police Trooper[1], noticed a white Chevrolet Silverado pickup truck (white truck) traveling at a high rate of speed sonthbonnd down M-10 (the Lodge). Tpr. Cope needed to accelerate to catch up with the vehicle and then slow down but he does not pull directly behind the vehicle. What Tpr. Cope's radar indicated, if anything is unknown as Tpr. Cope did

[redacted]

not author a report. However, looking at Tpr. Cope's dashcam video once Tpr. Cope's speed is steady at 63 miles per hour the white truck begins to slightly pull away from Tpr. Cope's patrol vehicle, indicating the white truck is going slightly faster than Tpr. Cope's vehicle before Tpr. Cope initiates the traffic stop. It is only once Tpr. Cope turns on his lights and pulls behind the white truck that the driver of the white truck slows down. The speed limit on that section of M-10 is 55 mph.

Looking at Michigan Archival Multiple Details Report for Tpr. Cope on May 16, 2025 it indicates that Tpr. Cope ran the personalized license plate "[redacted]" from the white Chevrolet Silverado pickup truck at 19:47:39 into LEIN. Twenty seconds later he received back the information that the white truck did not have valid insurance. At 19:48:40 Tpr. Cope activates his dash cam and then his BWC and can be seen trying to catch up to the white truck, which is about one minute before the still at 63 mph is taken.

Tpr. Cope initiated a traffic stop by pulling behind the white truck and activating his lights while they were both on M-10 and the white truck immediately pulled over on the side of M-10. Tpr. Cope announced at 19:49:47 over his loudspeaker "Take the next exit. Take the next exit. Take the next exit.". The white truck then pulled back into the right lane of M-10 and exited at Wyoming and then immediately pulled over at 19:50:09 on the service drive of the Wyoming exit, near several homes. As the vehicles are exiting the expressway on the exit ramp Tpr. Cope can be heard on his

BWC video as he calls in the vehicle information over his radio regarding the traffic stop he is beginning.

As soon as he parks his scout car Tpr. Cope exits and at 19:50:20 approaches the white truck. Tpr. Cope makes contact with the driver Stephen William Wangara-Mason, a 41-year-old male, and the sole occupant of the vehicle. Tpr. Cope tells Mason that when he 'ran the plate it indicates he did not have insurance', and he asks Mason 'Did it lapse?' Mason just leans to his glove box and starts grabbing paperwork and says "I don't aahh…" When he straightens up, he hands a small, folded piece of paper to Tpr. Cope and says "Registration". Mason then goes back to searching his paperwork, presumably for his insurance. Mason hands Tpr. Cope several pieces of paper and says to Tpr. Cope "Whatever shows up" (Tpr. Cope BWC 19:50:47). Tpr. Cope had also asked for Mason's driver's license which Mason provided. The several pieces of paper are from LA Insurance as Tpr. Cope opens them up and the logo is visible on his BWC. The truck's insurance has expired. When Tpr. Cope asked Mason about the expired insurance, Mason responds, "It probably is lapsed. I don't pay insurance." Tpr. Cope BWC 19:52:10. Tpr. Cope then hands Mason back his expired insurance paperwork.

As Tpr. Cope was looking at the paperwork, both copies[2] of the valid registration for Mason's truck[3] blew under his vehicle. Tpr. Cope looked but saw he could not safely retrieve the truck's registration and offered to allow Mason to obtain his vehicle's paperwork. Mason replied twice that he did not need his vehicle's paperwork. (Tpr. Cope's BWC 19:51:33). Between this suspicious response[4], his nervous demeanor as well as not having insurance for the vehicle and speeding, Tpr. Cope asked Mason to step from the vehicle. As Mason exited the driver's side of the vehicle, Tpr. Cope asks, "What are you reaching for?" (Tpr. Cope BWC video 19:51:59). At the same time as Tpr. Cope is asking the question, from Mason's right waist-lap area a handgun falls from his body, which had been concealed by the white towel; both the handgun and the white towel fall to the ground. (See the still on the next page of Mason's gun in front of the white towel falling from Mason's hip/waistband area, it is circled in red).

---

[2] Both copies of the registration for Mason's Chevrolet truck were still affixed to each other and were recovered at the scene on the service drive near the vehicles. This was the only paperwork recovered outside of the vehicles.

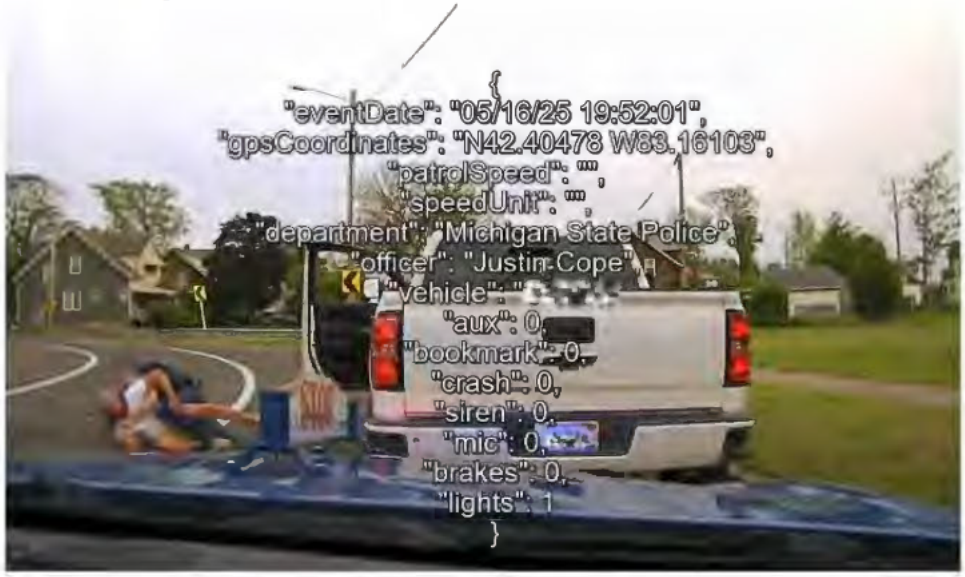
[3] The two copies of the registration Mason produced to Tpr. Cope for the white truck were valid and indicated the truck was registered with the Secretary of State to Stephen William Wangara-Mason and was valid through February 1, 2026.

[4] This writer classifies Mason's response that he did not need either copy of the valid vehicle registration as suspicious is based upon 1. it is a violation of MCL 257.223 to drive without it and both copies just blew away and 2. Mason had just admitted to violating MCL 257.328 for not having insurance. Having admitted to one offense why unnecessarily commit another before an officer?

Mason and Tpr. Cope immediately began wrestling as Mason lunges down, reaching with his left hand for the handgun he dropped while Tpr. Cope attempts to prevent Mason from gaining access to the firearm.

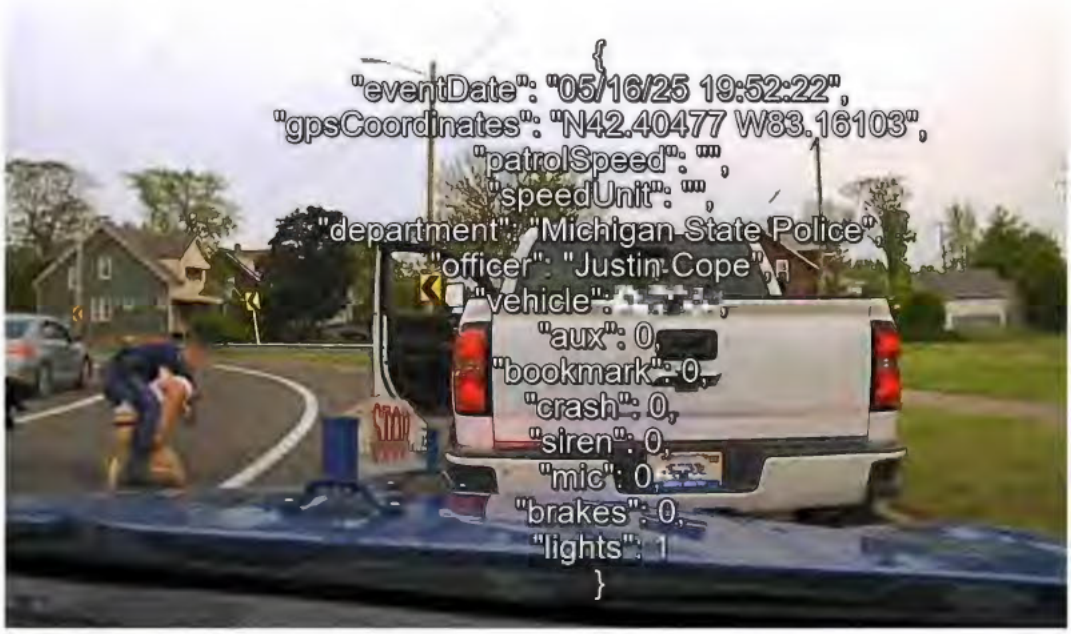
Almost immediately (1:52:01) Tpr. Cope's BWC falls off his torso and is pointed up in the air for the remainder of the incident and only catches small parts of the incident. Mason and Tpr. Cope are sparring on the service drive, with Mason attempting to

make it to the gun he dropped while Tpr. Cope is trying to arrest Mason and keep him away from his gun.



Tpr. Cope tries to subdue Mason by getting on top of him. At 19:52:09 while wrestling with Mason Tpr. Cope quickly called out over his radio that he was "Fighting with one". At 19:52:16 Tpr. Cope receives a response back that 'Other officers will respond' but he is very busy at that moment.

In an attempt to subdue Mason and to control Mason's arm and hand movements Tpr. Cope climbs onto Mason's back.



Looking at the above still from Tpr. Cope's dashcam at 19:52:22 Mason has got his upper body off the ground and is pushing up to straighten up his torso even though Tpr. Cope has his entire body on Mason's back. One second later at 19:52:23 Mason lunges back towards the area of his truck to reacquire his handgun with Tpr. Cope on his back.

Once Mason re-acquired his handgun Tpr. Cope knows he is battling for his life. Tpr. Cope is fighting Mason for control of the handgun as seen in the stills from his dashcam video at 19:52:28 and 19:52:31 in the PowerPoint and the dashcam video. On Tpr. Cope's BWC you can hear Tpr Cope loudly warn Mason two seconds later at 19:52:33 "Stop or I'm gonna shoot you."[5] Then at 19:52:35 as Mason and Tpr. Cope are fighting, you can see the barrel of the gun in Mason's right hand as Tpr. Cope is trying to gain control over it. (See still on the next page).

[5] While Tpr. Cope issues the warning to "Stop or I'm gonna shoot you.", it is Mason that has possession of the firearm. Tpr. Cope has not even attempted to draw his firearm at this point, Tpr. Cope has only attempted to disarm Mason.

Tpr. Cope rolls over Mason's back towards the white truck and onto the pavement at 19:52:38. Tpr. Cope ends up on the ground with Mason on his knees above him and in possession of the firearm, Mason has the firearm in his right-hand, arm extended with the firearm pressed directly into Tpr. Cope's chest as Tpr. Cope is trying to pull the firearm off his chest at 19:52:39.

Despite being in the inferior position Tpr. Cope is able to push Mason's right hand and the firearm away from his chest at 19:52:41 while he yells at Mason to "Stop!" (Tpr. Cope BWC 19:52:41) Mason then uses his body weight to push Tpr. Cope back down to the pavement at 19:52:44.

Mason then shoots Tpr. Cope three times in rapid succession, twice at point blank range in the chest and once in the clavicle at 19:52:46, 19:52:47 and 19:52:50 (the shot order is uncertain). The gunshots are clear on the audio portion of Tpr. Cope's dashcam video and the smoke is visible on the video. The two bullets to the chest do not penetrate Tpr. Cope's body because of his vest, but they cause injury to his chest as they were shot at point blank range. The bullet to his clavicle is not surgically removed until July 18, 2025.

Tpr. Cope's chest and right clavicle.

Tpr. Cope does not give up. He keeps fighting Mason on the service drive. Immediately after being shot for the third time Tpr. Cope manages to flip Mason onto his back and from the dashcam video clip enlarged here from 19:52:50 the gun in Mason's right hand.

Eventually Tpr. Cope ends up straddling Mason's waist and sitting on Mason while Tpr. Cope attempts for the first time to draw his sidearm at 19:52:55 with his right hand while Mason grips Tpr. Cope's right wrist preventing Tpr. Cope from pulling his weapon from its holster.

Tpr. Cope appears to be holding Mason's left wrist/forearm area to prevent Mason from shooting

him again as Mason still has the firearm in his right hand. (Tpr. Cope dashcam 19:52:57). This is harder to see due to their bodies blocking most of the view of the camera.

Mason rolls Tpr. Cope off him a bit so Tpr. Cope tries to stand but is still hunched over Mason as his radio cord is caught under Mason pulling him down. Tpr. Cope is tethered to Mason and cannot get away from him, but he is able to break Mason's grip on his right wrist at 19:53:13. With their bodies still locked in conflict mere inches apart, Mason is reaching up towards Tpr. Cope's right hand with his left hand (that same left hand which was moments earlier holding Tpr. Cope's right wrist preventing Tpr. Cope from pulling his weapon from its holster). Tpr. Cope's left arm is down towards Mason's right arm or wrist where Mason still is holding his firearm but the angle of Mason's hand and his firearm is blocked from view.

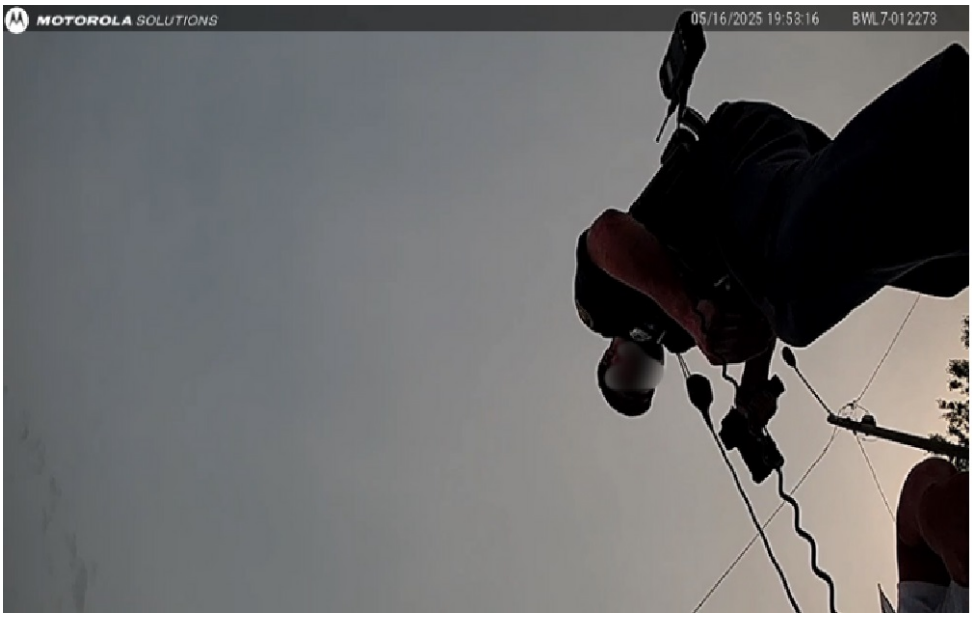
This still captures the moment that Tpr. Cope is finally able to pull his firearm out of its holster. It has been twenty-eight seconds since Tpr. Cope was first shot by Mason, and one minute fifteen seconds that Tpr. Cope has been fighting for his life.

Tpr. Cope immediately fires his first shot at Mason at 19:53:14. The second and third shot come at less than a second apart at 19:53:15[6] as Tpr. Cope is trying to get away from Mason but Tpr. Cope is unsuccessful in extricating himself from Mason as Mason is lying on Tpr. Cope's radio cord which is firmly affixed to his body, and it is pulling Tpr. Cope forward. It takes Tpr. Cope nearly 15 seconds to extricate himself from Mason due to the radio cord. (Tpr. Cope dashcam 19:53:29). Before he is able to

[6] The shot order that Tpr. Cope fired in is uncertain.

detach himself from Mason, Tpr. Cope while still leaning down close to Mason calls in on his radio "Shots fired. I'm hit". (Tpr. Cope BWC 19:53:20).

The best view of Tpr. Cope trying to get away from Mason and the issue of the radio cord is caught on Tpr. Cope's BWC.



At 19:53:16, one second after the shooting, Tpr. Cope tries to pull away from Mason but is thwarted.

As Tpr. Cope is trying to disentangle himself and get his radio cord out from under Mason, Tpr. Cope raises Mason's right wrist and clutched in Mason's right hand is Mason's revolver (Tpr. Cope dashcam 19:53:23). The firearm drops to the street as Tpr. Cope appears to knock it out of Mason's hand. Tpr. Cope then kicks the gun away from Mason twice initially; the sound of Tpr. Cope kicking Mason's firearm and it skittering along the pavement can be heard on his BWC at 19:53:32.

At 19:53:36 a civilian, , who saw most of the fight, approached Tpr. Cope immediately after the shooting finished to check to see if he was all right. When asked, "You all right?", Tpr. Cope responded, "I'm hit! I'm hit!", and then "I'm hit multiple times" as Tpr. Cope was pacing around, seemingly running on adrenaline and sounding breathless (it had been less than one minute since Tpr. Cope had been shot three times). At 19:53:56 Tpr. Cope calls in on his radio "Suspects down. I'm hit" as Tpr. Cope is examining Mason who is unmoving. The response he received was that 'EMS was on the way'. Tpr. Cope seemed understandably unsure of the extent of his injuries at this point as he called in "I got at least two in the vest, one in the shoulder. I think." (19:54:26 Tpr. Cope BWC).

Detroit Police Department Officers Audrianna Montgomery and Antwon Harrison pulled up to the scene about one minute forty-five seconds later. Officer Montgomery wrote in her report she saw Tpr. Cope walking away from an unknown male laying

face up on the ground with a suspected gunshot wound to his forehead. Tpr. Cope advised that he had been shot, and Officer Montgomery observed suspected blood coming from his uniform at his right shoulder and his left abdomen. He was placed into the backseat of their vehicle, and she radioed that she and her partner would be transporting Tpr. Cope to [redacted] Hospital and that additional units were needed at the location.

Stephen Wangara-Mason died on the M-10 service drive next to his truck from the gunshot wounds fired from Tpr. Cope's service weapon. EMS arrived at 19:59, six minutes after the shooting, and their report indicated Mason was obviously dead, and no resuscitation was started.

Detroit Police Officers Roger Drake (Officer Drake) and M. Flannel arrived on scene at 19:58 and observed a light skinned male in a white tee shirt lying on the ground near a white pickup. A few feet south of the white pickup Officer Drake observed a witness that he described as an older black male who was standing by stating he observed the shooting take place, but he had to leave to pick up his grandson. The witness stated he pulled around the service drive corner and he observed the trooper wrestling with the suspect on the ground. The witness stated he pulled his car over to the side of the road to help the trooper and that's when he heard three gunshots. The witness stated he thought the trooper shot the suspect, but it was the suspect who shot the trooper first.

The scene was declared secured at 20:01:43 when acting Sgt. Christopher Hardaway from the Michigan State Police arrived and ensured the scene was secure and the evidence was preserved for later processing. Tpr. Evan Ashley (Tpr. Ashley) arrived on scene after Tpr. Cope had left for the hospital and at D/Lt. Edward Price's (Lt. Price) directive he located Tpr. Cope's BWC, he deactivated it at 21:31 and provided it to Sgt. Russell Lady (Sgt. Lady) of the MSP. Tpr. Ashley also deactivated the camera inside Tpr. Cope's patrol vehicle at 20:28 again pursuant to Lt. Price's request and took some photographs of the scene with his department issued iPhone which were forwarded to D/Lt. Richard Sanchez (Lt. Sanchez) from SIS.

Stephen Wangara-Mason was pronounced deceased at the scene at 19:59 hours by EMS personnel who noted that he was showing obvious signs of death and so no resuscitation was attempted. They included that he had a gun shot wound to the head with brain matter present and that Mason was cold to the touch in a warm environment.

Detroit Police Officers and Michigan State Troopers were immediately dispatched to [redacted] Hospital where Tpr. Cope had been conveyed. Tpr. Cope was located in Trauma Bay # 4 and all his clothing, his duty belt, bullet proof vest, his Sig Sauer service weapon and both back up magazines were confiscated as evidence and immediately photographed on site by D/Sgt. Michael Klenner (Sgt. Klenner). The

evidence was then placed into property bags. Tpr. Cope's injuries to his entire body, including the injuries to his hands, arm, legs and knees as well as the bullet wounds to his chest and clavicle, were documented and photographed.

The evidence was taken back to the Homicide Task Force. A round count was conducted by Tpr. Henry Anderson III, Sgt. Klenner and Sgt. Lady on Tpr. Cope's Sig Sauer which had a 21-round magazine loaded into the handgun. There were 18 rounds in the magazine and 1 in the chamber for a total of 19 rounds. Both of Tpr. Cope's back up magazines were loaded to capacity and had not been fired. The evidence shows Tpr. Cope fired his Sig Sauer three times at the scene which accounts for the three absent rounds.

Crime Scene investigators located three spent casings at the scene. Casings 1 & 2 were located just south of Mason's body and casing 3 was located just west of the body but before the white truck, near Mason's left hand when viewing the photographs of the scene in the PowerPoint. All three casings have the same stamp on their base "FC 9MM LUGER". The 19 rounds that were recovered from Tpr. Cope's Sig Sauer all bear the same "FC 9MM LUGER" stamp on their base.

Tpr. Cope's uniform shows evidence of three gunshot wounds and blood coating the right shoulder and chest/abdomen area. His undershirt which is worn between the bullet proof vest and the skin was soaked with blood. Photograph 133234638 (below) is a close up of the two bullet holes in Tpr. Cope's uniform which show where the two shots to Tpr. Cope's chest entered his shirt and vest.

The damage and evidence left on Tpr. Cope's uniform shows that one of the shots was a contact shot, meaning the muzzle of the revolver was pressed up against Tpr. Cope's chest when the bullet was fired; note the star-shaped pattern which is created by muzzle gases that were trapped under the clothing which can cause the star-shaped tear pattern as they blow back out from the entry hole. The other shot was taken at close-range, defined as being within a few feet; note the soot deposit in a visible ring of soot, unburned gunpowder and residue which were deposited around the entry hole. There is no good photograph of the entry hole into his uniform that penetrated Tpr. Cope's right clavicle, likely due to medical

personnel having cut his shirt open at the right shoulder for immediate medical assessment and treatment.

The photographs of Tpr. Cope's bullet proof vest shows where the bullets penetrated the vest. The dark blue bullet proof vest cover shows two entry holes close together. The interior plates show the bullets penetrating the vest where they lodged and as well as blood at one shoulder. (Photograph below)

On the left is a close up of the bullets while still embedded in Tpr. Cope's vest. On the right are the bullets after being removed from the vest; note the vest fibers stuck to one bullet.

WITNESSES

Not all the witnesses to this event gave accurate accounts of what occurred, and their differencing perceptions may be accounted for by the exciting and traumatic event, that they only saw a small portion of the event, or that they were driving while viewing the event. It is a well-documented fact that not everyone perceives the same events at the same time in the same manner. In this investigation all the witnesses were given an opportunity to give a formal statement to the police about what occurred, some multiple times, hut not all the witnesses were willing to give statements to the police. Those statements, even those that cannot be reconciled when compared with the other evidence, are included here.

[redacted], age 37, was interviewed at the scene by DPD Officer Jazmine Randle (Officer Randle), which was picked up on her BWC. Then [redacted] police station and consented to provide a formal statement to DPD Det. Brad Conner (Det. Conner) which was recorded, and a brief summary was written out by Det. Conner and signed by [redacted]. All of [redacted] statements were provided on May 16, 2025. [redacted] stated she was driving southbound on the Lodge and exited the expressway at Wyoming when she saw the trooper's vehicle was pulled behind a white pickup truck. Both the trooper and the driver were outside of their vehicles tussling. Her vehicle was initially stopped because of a traffic back up on the ramp.

She stated the trooper was able to swing and throw the driver down on to the ground, "kinda like body-slammed him". The driver was on his back with the trooper on top of him. They were still tussling. She did see the driver putting his hands up and out (at this point in the interview [redacted] has both arms extended out and she makes a grabbing motions with both hands indicating the driver is grabbing at the trooper with both hands) stating maybe the driver was trying to stop the trooper or calm him down. [redacted]nits to Officer Randle she could not really see since she was 'back behind here' (indicating behind the cars while viewing this), that the trooper's back was to her, she could see the man's legs, but she could not see if the man was trying to get out of the trooper's grasp. She stated the cars ahead of her moved, and she needed to leave but she did not want to leave, and she was in shock.

[redacted] stated she then looked away and did not see the trooper pull his gun. She heard the first gunshot, and she looked over and the trooper was getting up as he was shooting and she saw the gun. She indicated as soon as the trooper was done shooting, he was still pointing his gun down at the driver ([redacted] makes the gesture with her right hand and arm pointing down straight as if she has a gun) and states the trooper was doing this while he was talking to the man in the corvette. Then the trooper puts his gun back in his holster. She heard a total of 4-5 shots.

[redacted] denies ever seeing the driver with a gun. She never heard anyone's conversation out there. She saw the trooper move towards the driver's head and it appeared he was trying to pull a cord out from under his head. After the shots she did not see the guy moving and the trooper was breathing hard, gesturing, and talking, but she could not hear what he said. Once the shooting was over it was clear the driver was shot. She saw the trooper messing with his radio cord, walking, and talking to the guy from the corvette. She did not know if the trooper called in on his radio and she did not see any evidence that the trooper got shot. [redacted] admitted to Officer Randle she did not see how the fight started.

After [redacted] states she saw the trooper fire his gun, she saw a tall black gentleman in a white corvette who got out of his car walk toward the trooper and have a conversation. She says he was in front of her, closer to the fight and had his phone out. At one point she tells Det. Conner that she believes the gentleman was recording the incident and later during the same interview she states she doesn't think he was recording the incident.[7] The gentleman walked back to his corvette and got in and as he was walking, she noticed he had a gun in his waistband, but he never pulled it out. He drove his corvette around the trooper and parked in front of the white truck. Then the man got out of the corvette and walked toward the trooper. Shortly thereafter other police officers arrived and then she lost sight of the gentleman. Other officers picked up the trooper and took him away.

Detroit Police Officers Roger Drake and M Flannel arrived on scene at 19:58 and made contact with a witness that Officer Drake described as an older black male who was standing by the white truck stating he observed the shooting take place, but he had to leave to pick up his grandson. The witness stated he pulled around the service drive corner and he observed the trooper wrestling with the suspect on the ground. The witness stated he pulled his car over to the side of the road to help the trooper and that's when he heard three gunshots. The witness stated he thought the trooper shot the suspect, but it was the suspect who shot the trooper first. Officers Drake and Flannel were then directed to block off an intersection and did not write down the witness's name but from subsequent interviews it is apparent the witness was [redacted].

---

[7] This writer acknowledges that [redacted] statements are disjointed and somewhat confusing. It was challenging to attempt to piecemeal one coherent statement from [redacted] interview at the scene, her 40-minute interview with Det. Conner and her written statement as sometimes her statements seem to conflict or change, the order of events change, what happened changes sometimes even within the same statement, but this writer also recognizes this was a very intense and scary event that occurred quickly.

[redacted] ([redacted]) was interviewed at the scene by Tpr. Javon Strickland[8] and he stated when he pulled around the corner, he observed Tpr. Cope and the suspect together and they both fell on the ground. [redacted] stated Tpr. Cope, and the suspect began to wrestle on the ground while Tpr. Cope was attempting to subdue the suspect, at this moment Tpr. Cope was on top of the suspect then suddenly he heard three gunshots. [redacted] thought Tpr. Cope fired three-gun shots but realized that the suspect had fired three shots first and struck Tpr. Cope. [redacted] claimed after Tpr. Cope was struck, he still attempted to handcuff the suspect. [redacted] stated the suspect fired another shot and at that moment Tpr. Cope did not have a choice because he was fighting for his life. I asked [redacted] if he could stay on scene to talk to Detectives, he advised he had to leave to pick up a family member.

[redacted], age 55, is the gentleman on the BWC and dashcam videos who approaches Tpr. Cope immediately after the fight asking Tpr. Cope if he is ok. He does a longer, follow-up interview with the Detroit Police Department.

On May 19, 2025 [redacted] came into the Detroit Police Department for an interview and provided a lengthy statement about the incident which was video recorded. There was also a short, written statement filled out during that interview with DPD Officer Terrell Williams and Det. Chase Malloy. [redacted] stated that he stayed on scene as long as he could, but he had to leave and pick up his grandson (the previously mentioned family member). [redacted] said he was driving and had turned onto the service drive and went go around the traffic stop when he saw the officer and a man already on the ground wrestling and he decided to watch and wait. As they were wrestling the officer was on top and the guy was on his bottom, [redacted] believed the officer was trying to arrest the man.

After about a minute he heard three shots very close together[9]. At first [redacted] did not see the gun, and there were times during the fight where he could not see everything, but when he saw the revolver "the guy had total control of the revolver." [redacted] admitted he assumed at first it was the officer who shot the man, but then after hearing these shots, he could see the man was still holding the gun and the officer was still trying to get ahold of that gun. (At this point in the interview [redacted] was making motions with his hand to indicate the officer was pushing the barrel of the revolver away from his own chest). It appeared to [redacted] that the man had total control of the revolver. The officer and the man still 'continue to struggle pretty bad, and then the officer lets off a couple of shots, at least two shots'.

---

[8] [redacted] was also briefly interviewed later at the scene by DPD Lt. Jason Kile who he again told that he had witnesses the incident, but he needed to leave and pick up a family member.

[9] [redacted] said he believes he heard three shots in the initial volley. He knows it was at least two. He described it as "Pop! Pop! Pop!" in rapid succession to the officers.

[redacted] said it was very hard to estimate the time between the first round of shots and the second round of shots as they continued to struggle over the revolver but it no more than a minute, or maybe two. "In my opinion he (the officer) was fighting for his life".

[redacted] relayed that the officer knocked/kicked the man's gun away from the man after the officer had fired, so the gun could have still been in the man's hand, the officer was trying to get it away from him. [redacted] stated he then approached the officer and asked if he was ok. The officer responded "I'm hit. I'm hit", "I'm hit. I'm hit." and indicated he was shot in his shoulder and in his vest. [redacted] stated he could see the officer was bleeding from his shoulder and that he was bleeding from where the officer was shot in the vest area ([redacted] demonstrated for the interviewing officers where on his own body with his hands that he saw the blood coming from the officer). About 1-2 minutes later [redacted] stated the officer was picked up by the Detroit Police in a SUV and "then everybody (meaning the police) started coming" to the location.

When asked to estimate the distance, [redacted] estimated he was sitting about 1 ½ car lengths away from the fight, as he was in his car parked right behind Tpr. Cope's car, basically bumper to bumper and he was stationary in his vehicle. The officer's car had its lights flashing as if it had started as a traffic stop. [redacted] was driving a white corvette and saw lots of people just driving by the fight as there was another lane to pass. He stated he had never been in any position like this before, but it looked to him as though the officer needed help.

Officers canvassed the neighborhood for witnesses and for video cameras that could have caught the incident but were unsuccessful. At [redacted] they spoke with [redacted] who stated he heard about 6 or 7 gunshots, but he did not provide any other information. He allowed DPD Det. Chase Malloy to view the Ring App on his cell phone, but it did not capture the incident.

Officers were alerted to comments on social media about the shooting on the site "CrimeintheD" by [redacted] who called and then emailed the Detroit Police Department attaching the post. The comments are:

> [redacted]: The man never got the chance to get off the ground. As soon as the officer stood over him, shots was fired…but REMIND YALL while they was tussling the officer was already on top of him reaching for the gun
>
> [redacted]: so he didn't really shoot the officer 3 times?
>
> [redacted]: No, and I personally feel like if he was shot in the shoulder he would've held his arm or blood would've been showing through that blue ass

shit, girl That officer shot 3times (Only shots fired) stood hack to catch his breath, not get on his walkie talkie asking for backup or nothing

Poster's name blotted out but the photo is the same as the one for [redacted]*:* Man I seen that shit FIRST HAND I'M Talking Ahout I STOPPED TRAFFIC TO SEE THE SHIT BREAK OFF YES THEY WAS TUSSLING, No I don't Know How They Got On The Ground Nor How To Officer Got On Top of Him, BUT IT WAS A TUSSLE AND THE OFFICER WAS LOSING, Boom, The OFFICER REACHED FOR HIS HOLDER FIRST !!!!!!!!! IF ANYTHING THAT MAN WS TRYNA SAVE HIMSELF AND STARTTED FIGHTING EVEN HARDER TO GET THE OFFICER HAND OFF THE GUN !!!!!! THE OFFICER STOOD UP HOVERING OVER THAT MAN AND FIRED 3 SHOTS, Mind Yall, THE WAS STILL ON THE GROUND, That Officer Stood Over Him And Shot 2 times In The Body And The Last Shot Was A Head Shot NOT ONE TIME DID I SEE THAT OFFICER BLEEDING OR ANYTHING FROM A GUNSHOT WOUND but I definitely did watch that black man with blonde dreads take his last Mfnn breath LIKEWHEN TF DID THAT MAM GET HIS OWN GUN

The following comment was reposted by [redacted] *and it did not list the original poster:*

Hey I'm a friend of the guy who was shot by the trooper. I'm just coming from identifying him at the medical examiners. I saw the comments and you seem to be the only one who saw the incident as far I know. I want you to know that was a good brutha! He built that big Kwanzaa Kanara (candle holder) that's downtown in campus every year. Had his own business so forth and so on but they seem to be painting a different picture. Any help you can give would be greatly appreciated.

The last comment appears to have been posted by [redacted] *as her photograph appeared next to the post and was directly below the repost from above:* The story that social media is pushing is NOT what my eyes seen. I did not see the 41yr old with a weapon and I also didn't see him shoot the officer

The Detroit Police Department investigated to determine who the poster [redacted] was and try to interview them. Once they determined the poster on social media using [redacted] on "CrimeintheD" was [redacted] of [redacted], [redacted], the Officer in Charge of this investigation DPD Sgt. Jarmiare McEntire (Sgt. MacEntire) called her twice and left messages asking to speak with her about what she saw. Sgt. McEntire spoke over the telephone with a male at her home who stated he was her boyfriend and that he would give her the message, but he declined to give his name. Sgt. McEntire sent DPD Officer Terrell Williams to her residence to see if

she would make a statement but there was no response at her home. [redacted] has never responded back to either officer's attempts to contact her or make a statement about the events on May 16, 2025.

MASON'S REVOLVER

Throughout this memorandum the .38 Special Smith and Wesson model 36 five shot revolver serial number J591747 that fell from Mason's waistband area when he exited the white truck at 19:51:59 on Tpr Cope's BWC is referred to as "Mason's gun", or "Mason's revolver", or "Mason's firearm". It is not just because Mason brought the gun into the situation and it fell from his right hip area as he exited his truck, Stephen William Wangara-Mason registered that same.38 Special Smith and Wesson model 36 five shot revolver serial number J591747 on September 24, 2009.

Back in 2009 Mason was eligible to own, register and possess a firearm. However, on July 27, 2015 Mason was charged with Felonious Assault, Felony Firearm, Aiming Without Malice and Reckless Use of a Firearm in Wayne County.

On November 3, 2015 on file # 15-007072-01-FH Mason pled guilty to Felonious Assault and was sentenced on December 2, 2015; the remaining charges, including Felony Firearm, were dismissed. His probation was closed after a delinquency notice was sent to the court as Mason had only paid $350.00 out of the $1,868.00 that he was assessed. The current balance owed is still $1,518.00.

That means Mason was not eligible to possess a firearm after his 2015 conviction[10] and he was never allowed to drive with a loaded firearm in the car. In Michigan, regardless if the felony was specified or non-specified, in order to restore state level gun rights there are several condition precedents that must be met, one being that the individual must have paid all fines and costs in full, which Mason did not do. Which means Mason could not have had his right to possess a firearm restored in the State of Michigan. From his prior case Mason was aware that if he were caught with a gun in the car, he could be charged with Carrying a Concealed Weapon, Felon in Possession of a Firearm and Felony Firearm and he was facing a mandatory two-year prison sentence consecutive to any other sentence for the Felony Firearm charge.

AUTOPSY

According to the Medical Examiner's Report Mason was pronounced dead on the scene on May 16, 2025. He was taken to the Office of the Wayne County Medical

---

[10] This writer checked the Register of Actions for file # 15-007072-01-FH and Stephen Wangara-Mason did not apply to have this conviction expunged. A review of his Complete Criminal History (CCH) still shows he had this felonious assault conviction on his record on the date of the incident.

Examiner where an autopsy was performed the following day. It was the opinion of Dr. Jeffrey Hudson, Assistant Medical Examiner and Dr. Vasudevan Mahligam[11], Forensic Pathology Fellow, that the death of Stephen Wangara-Mason was caused by multiple (3) gunshot wounds. The gunshot wounds were to the head, neck and abdomen.

The gunshot wound to the forehead was described as close range as there was concentric gunpowder stippling on the skin surrounding the wound. The wound track started from the frontal bone and ended in the right occipital scalp. This injury is associated with multiple fractures of the skull and hemorrhages. A deformed, jacketed bullet was recovered from the head and retained.

The gunshot entered the left side of his neck with marginal abrasion with no soot or stippling on the skin surrounding the wound. The wound track was through muscle and soft tissue of the neck and then cervical vertebrae 3. A deformed, jacketed bullet was recovered from the neck and retained.

The gunshot wound to the left side of the abdomen with no soot or stippling on the skin surrounding the wound. The bullet traveled through several organs until it stopped in the soft tissue in his right back. Associated with this wound was 500 ml of bloody fluid in the abdomen, and 600 ml of bloody fluid in the right chest. A deformed, jacketed bullet was recovered from the head and retained.

There were numerous abrasions and scrapes noted that were consistent with a fight that was caught on the video and are consistent with the photographs. The manner of death was declared a homicide.

BALLISTICS

The Officer in Charge Sgt. McEntire submitted numerous pieces of evidence that were recovered at the Wyoming and the M-10 service drive crime scene to the Michigan State Police Forensic Science Division Firearms/Toolmarks Unit for analysis on July 15, 2025. The evidence initially submitted were the three fired cartridges (items 1 A-C) that were stamped "FC 9MM LUGER", Mason's .38 Special S & W revolver serial number J591747 (item 2), three .38 caliber Federal fired cartridge casings (items 3 A-C), two fired bullets[12] (items 4 A-B), Tpr. Cope's 9 mm

---

[11] Dr. Vasudevan Mahligam was a Forensic Pathology Fellow at the time he assisted Dr. Jeffrey Hudson with the autopsy of Stephen Wangara-Mason but had been promoted to Assistant Wayne County Medical Examiner when this writer spoke to Dr. Mahligam on September 16, 2025.

[12] The 2 fired bullets in 4 A-B were the ones removed from Tpr. Cope's vest. The third bullet was not removed until Tpr. Cope's surgery on July 18, 2025. (DPD evidence item 31).

Luger caliber Sig Sauer pistol (item 5), one fired bullet (item 6), one fired bullet (item 7), and one fired bullet (item 8).

During the course of testing and comparison Mason's .38 Special S & W was test fired twice, and both fired cartage case and bullets were recovered. During testing and comparison Tpr. Cope's 9 mm Luger caliber Sig Sauer pistol was test fired four times; two times using the labs bullets and two times using cartridges from the submitted cartridges and all four fired cartage cases and bullets were recovered.

On September 8, 2025 Shelby Szymoniak, Forensic Scientist and an expert in Firearms/Toolmarks Unit issued a report after having performed the tests and made the comparisons. She identified that the three 9mm Luger FC cartridge casings (items 1 A-C) found at the scene near Mason's body and the three fired bullets (items 6, 7 & 8) that were removed from Stephen Wangara-Mason's head, neck and back were identified as having been fired from Tpr. Cope's 9 mm Luger caliber Sig Sauer pistol (item 5).

Shelby Szymoniak identified[13] that the three .38 Special caliber Federal fired cartilages (items 3 A-C) that came from Mason's revolver and that one of the fired bullets that was removed from Tpr. Cope's vest (item 4B) were all fired from Mason's .38 Special Smith and Wesson five shot revolver (item 2). The other fired bullet (item 4A) that was removed from Tpr. Cope's vest when comparing it to Mason's revolver was inconclusive, the report stating that the items share class characteristics with some agreement of the individual characteristics observed in the land impressed areas. The agreement observed is insufficient for an identification (4A was not eliminated as having been fired from Mason's S & W revolver). The fired bullet (4A) was eliminated as having been fired from Tpr. Cope's Sig Sauer (item 5) but consistent with being fired from a .38/9mm caliber class fired lead bullet displaying conventional rifling specifications of five lands and grooves with a right twist.

These are the two fired bullets (4 A-B) pulled from Tpr. Cope's vest that were compared to both firearms. One fired bullet appears more intact and less compressed than the other.

[13] On the Conclusion Scale for Microscopic Comparisons "identification" is the strongest statement of association that can be expressed. An identification is made when there is an agreement of all discernable class characteristics and sufficient agreement of the individua characteristics of toolmarks. When sufficient agreement exists, in part, this means the likelihood of another tool producing the same marks is so remote it is considered a practical impossibility.

The bullet that went into Tpr. Cope's clavicle had not yet been removed at the time this evidence was submitted to the MSP Forensic Science Division Firearms/Toolmarks Unit for analysis and is therefore not mentioned in its conclusions. The bullet that was removed from Tpr. Cope's clavicle was submitted to the Michigan State Police Forensic Science Division Firearms/Toolmarks Unit for analysis significantly later and the results are still outstanding.

V. Discussion

THE INITIAL TRAFFIC STOP

Tpr. Justin Cope pulled Mason over for a traffic violation and told Mason he needed Mason to step out of the truck because he did not have insurance on the vehicle. This led to Mason dropping his Smith and Wesson .38 caliber revolver as he exited the vehicle and the subsequent fight as Mason tried to reclaim possession of the revolver. Tpr. Cope does not have to give Mason the truthful reason he is requesting that Mason step from the vehicle[14] there only needs to be a valid reason to stop the vehicle. It was true that Mason did not have insurance on the truck and Mason admitted as much to Tpr. Cope stating, "It probably is lapsed. I don't pay insurance." Tpr. Cope BWC 19:52:10. Driving without valid insurance is a violation of MCL 257.328. Mason was speeding. What seemed to alarm Tpr. Cope more is that Mason did have valid registration for his truck and both copies blew under his truck, and yet when Tpr. Cope offered to allow Mason to exit his truck to retrieve the seemingly only copies of his valid registration Mason was adamant he did "not need it". Mason appeared to not want to exit his truck and driving away without a copy of his registration in the vehicle would be a violation of MCL 257.223. Mason seemed to be acting odd at this point from his reactions on Tpr. Cope's BWC. What Tpr. Cope's true motivations for stopping the vehicle nor for asking Mason to step out of the vehicle are unknown as he did not author a report, nor are they relevant for 4th amendment purposes.

It is clear from Tpr. Cope's dashcam that that Mason's truck was speeding, going at least 63 in a 55 mile per hour zone on the M-10 (the Lodge). That is a valid reason to pull over Mason. See *People v Williams*, 472 Mich. 318, 314-315, 696 NW2d 636 (2005) "[T] here is no dispute that the initial traffic stop was occasioned by defendant's speeding, and was therefore based on probable cause and was reasonable.". After observing the speeding violation, Tpr. Cope then runs the truck's vehicle information

[14] As a general rule police can lie to a suspect about the extent of evidence they have against them or if co-defendants have made statements against them. See Frazier v Cupp, 394 U. Us. 731, 739, 89 S. Ct. 1420 (1969). The police do not have to tell the truth about the reason for the traffic stop; the law only requires a valid reason for the stop.

as he begins to exit the expressway and discovers the truck has no valid insurance as well, another traffic infraction. As soon as the vehicles stop, Tpr. Cope immediately exits his scout car and approaches Mason's truck; there is not a second of delay. Once pulled over Mason is unable to provide valid insurance and admits he does not have any, only confirming what Tpr. Cope already knows. Once Tpr. Cope had pulled Mason's truck over for the valid traffic infractions, speeding and/or no insurance, Tpr. Cope may then legally order the driver of the vehicle, Mason, out of the vehicle, without violating the 4th amendment. *Pennsylvania v Mimms,* 434 U.S. 106, 111, 98 S.Ct 330, (1997). "We hold only that once a motor vehicle has been lawfully detained for a traffic violation, the police officers may order the driver to get out of the vehicle without violating the Fourth Amendment's proscription of unreasonable searches and seizures." *Id* at note 6.

Michigan has adopted this standard and expanded it to vehicle passengers acknowledging that once a defendant's vehicle is lawfully stopped for a traffic violation a defendant can be ordered out of their car citing *Mimms*. *People v Harmelin,* 176 Mich App 524, 531, 440 NW2d 75 (1989); *People v Martinez,* 187 Mich App 160, 168 466 NW2d 380 (1991). The United States Supreme Court has held that the reasonableness of a traffic stop does not depend on the subjective intentions of the police officers involved; a traffic stop is valid when the facts, viewed objectively, establish probable cause to believe that a traffic violation has occurred or was occurring. *Whren v US,* 517 U.S. 806, 813, 116 S.Ct. 1769 (1996).

In this case Tpr. Cope observed a traffic infraction occurring, obtained information on the vehicle of a second violation before the vehicle was pulled over. The driver, Mason, admitted to the violation of not having insurance. Then the driver stated he did not need the two copies of his valid registration which had just blown under his car. Meaning if he drove away from the scene, he would be committing a 3rd traffic violation in front of the trooper. Mason also seemed to be nervous at the prospect of getting out of his vehicle. But it legally does not matter. Tpr. Cope could have him step from the vehicle for a different subjective reason once the vehicle has been stopped for a valid traffic citation.

The Michigan Supreme Court has held that a traffic stop is reasonable as long as the driver is detained only for a "reasonable period of time" to ask reasonable questions concerning the alleged violation of law and its context, to obtain additional information about the offense, e.g., the circumstances leading to its commission, the reason for the stop, to request the driver's identification and paperwork, the driver's destination, travel plans, the purpose and itinerary for the trip, in order to determine what violations have taken place, and whether to issue a warning, a citation, or to

make an arrest. Additionally, they held a police officer may ask follow-up questions when the initial answers given are suspicious. *People v Williams,* 472 Mich 308, 315-316, 696 NW2d 636 (2005). In the instant case, Tpr. Cope pulled Mason over on the service drive at 19:50:09 and after examining his identification and paperwork, and confirming said violations, Tpr. Cope had Mason step out of his vehicle (which is when Mason dropped the gun) 1 minute 50 seconds later at 19:51:59. Being detained less than two minutes to be asked questions by an officer for multiple traffic infractions before being asked to step from the vehicle is a reasonable period of time.

In *People v Martinez,* 187 Mich App 160, 166, 466 NW2d 380 (1991), the Michigan Court of Appeals quotes several U.S. Supreme Court decisions that are directly on point to this analysis and the dangers offers face during a traffic stop:

> "Certainly it would be unreasonable to require that police officers take unnecessary risks in the performance of their duties." *Terry v. Ohio,* [392 U.S. 1, 23, 88 S.Ct. 1868 [1881], 20 L.Ed.2d 889 (1968)]. And we have specifically recognized the inordinate risk confronting an officer as he approaches a person seated in an automobile. "According to one study, approximately 30% of police shootings occurred when a police officer approached a suspect seated in an automobile. Bristow, *Police Officer Shootings—A Tactical Evaluation,* 54 J Crim L C & P S 93 (1963)." *Adams v. Williams,* 407 U.S. 143, 148, n. 3 [92 S.Ct. 1921, 1924, n. 3, 32 L.Ed.2d 612 (1972)]. We are aware that not all these assaults occur when issuing traffic summons [sic], but we have before expressly declined to accept the argument that traffic violations necessarily involve less danger to officers than other types of confrontations. *United States v. Robinson,* 414 U.S. 218, 234 [94 S.Ct. 467, 476, 38 L.Ed.2d 427 (1973)]. Indeed, it appears "that a significant percentage of murders of police officers occurs when the officers are making traffic stops." *Id.* at 234, n. 5, 94 S.Ct. at 476 n. 5.

It is clear that Tpr. Cope's traffic stop of Mason was legal, and he was legally allowed to tell Mason to step from the vehicle on May 16, 2025 during the traffic stop as Mason was the driver and sole occupant of the vehicle.

USE OF FORCE, USE OF DEADLY FORCE & RELATED POLICIES

All Michigan State Police officers are required to follow Official Order 05-01 Subject Control and Use of Force and Official Order 05-02 Use of Deadly Force[15].

OFFICAL ORDER 05-01 Subject Control and Use of Force

05-01-1 OBJECTIVELY REASONABLE USE OF FORCE

A. Under the Fourth Amendment of the United States Constitution, a law enforcement officer may only use such force as is "objectively reasonable" under all of the circumstances. The standard that courts will use to examine whether the use of force is constitutional was first set forth in Graham v. Connor, 490 U.S. 386 (1989), and expanded by subsequent court cases. The reasonableness of a particular use of force must be judged from the perspective of a reasonable law enforcement officer on the scene at the moment the force was used, rather than with 20/20 vision of hindsight. The reasonableness must account for the fact that law enforcement 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.

B. Reasonableness will be determined by balancing the nature and quality of the intrusions with the countervailing governmental interests. The question is whether the law enforcement officer's actions are objectively reasonable in light of the facts and circumstances confronting the officer. Objective factors will determine the reasonableness of force including, but not limited to, the severity of the crime, whether the suspect poses an immediate threat to the safety of the law enforcement officers or others, and whether the suspect is actively resisting arrest or attempting to evade arrest by flight.

OFFICAL ORDER 05-02-1 Use of Deadly Force

A. Deadly force is any use of force that creates a substantial risk of causing death or serious bodily harm.

B. Deadly force is authorized to protect enforcement members or others from what is reasonably believed to be a threat of death or serious bodily harm.

[15] Some portions of Official Order 05-01 Subject Control and Use of Force and Official Order 05-02 Use of Deadly Force were not included in this memorandum as they were not relevant to this situation or analysis.

C. Deadly force shall be exercised only when all other reasonable efforts to subdue the subject have failed or reasonable efforts cannot succeed without endangering the life of the enforcement member or others.

D. If a verbal warning is feasible under the circumstances and doing so will not increase the risk of injury to the member or any other person, the enforcement member should identify themselves as a law enforcement officer and give a verbal warning of their intent to use deadly force.

OFFICAL ORDER 05-02-2 FIREARMS

B. Enforcement members and authorized non-enforcement members shall consider the totality of the circumstances when deciding to draw, point, or discharge a firearm, including, but not limited to, the following factors:

(1) Severity of the offense.

(2) Risk of injury to innocent bystanders.

(3) Immediate threat to the enforcement member(s) and the public.

(4) Apparent age of the suspect

(5) Victim-suspect relationship.

(6) Knowledge of the suspect's identity.

C. Life-Threatening Felony

(1) Firearms may be drawn, pointed, or discharged to affect an arrest when an enforcement member has probable cause to believe a person has committed a life-threatening felony listed in Section 05-02-2 C.(2) below or has escaped from custody after having been arrested for or convicted of committing a life-threatening felony.

(2) Whenever used in the Official Orders, life-threatening felonies are:

a. Murder and attempted murder

(3) An enforcement member shall not discharge a firearm on a person who is fleeing on suspicion alone that such person may have committed a life-threatening felony or solely because a person fails to stop on command or runs a blockade.

F. Drawing Firearms

(1) Firearms may be drawn or displayed only when an enforcement member or authorized non-enforcement member, is confronted with a potentially life-endangering situation.

In this case the evidence shows that as Mason exits the driver's side of the vehicle, Tpr. Cope asks, "What are you reaching for?". (Tpr. Cope BWC video 19:51:59). At that same time Tpr. Cope asks the question, Mason's Smith and Wesson revolver falls from his right waist-lap area after being concealed in a white towel and both Mason's handgun and the ground.

Mason immediately lunged down, reaching with his left hand for the handgun he dropped while Tpr. Cope attempts to prevent him from gaining access to the firearm. Mason and Tpr. Cope are struggling in the street, with Tpr. Cope trying to control Mason's arm and hand movements to prevent him from grabbing the gun, but Mason manages to reacquire his handgun. Once Mason has control of the revolver Tpr. Cope tries to wrestle the gun away from Mason by grabbing the barrel and he is trying to keep from being shot by Mason, yet Tpr. Cope warns Mason at 19:52:33 "Stop or I'm gonna shoot you.". At this point Tpr. Cope has not yet reached for his firearm and shooting Mason is not something Tpr. Cope is physically able to do at this point, but Tpr. Cope does make that statement at 19:52:33. At 19:52:39 Mason pushes the barrel of the gun directly against Tpr. Cope's chest, Tpr. Cope pushes it off his chest momentarily and yells "Stop!" at 19:52:41. Mason ignores that order to "Stop!" and

shoots Tpr. Cope three times, twice at point blank range in the chest and once in the clavicle at 19:52:46, 19:52:47 and 19:52:50.

Mason has already used deadly force against Tpr. Cope. Tpr. Cope was authorized to use deadly force against Mason before he was shot, yet Tpr. Cope only seemed to try and disarm Mason, and he did not attempt to draw his own weapon at this time. Two verbal warnings were given to Mason and Mason ignored them. The second verbal warning od "Stop!" was given just five seconds before Mason shot Tpr. Cope the first time.

Tpr. Cope's use of force was reasonable in light of the circumstances. Mason created a life-threatening situation to Tpr. Cope and members of the public who drove by, of which there were several from the video evidence, by bringing a gun into the situation and then fighting over it. Tpr. Cope did not violate MSP's policies on Use of Force nor Use of Deadly Force.

Even after he is shot three times by Mason Tpr. Cope still seems to be focused on disarming Mason. Tpr. Cope was unable to disarm Mason, had been shot three times and managed to sit on top of Mason. While sitting on Mason then Tpr. Cope attempted to draw his firearm from his holster for the first time at 19:52:55. He was initially unsuccessful as Mason grabbed his wrist and Tpr. Cope was also trying to stop Mason from shooting him again. Eventually after fighting Mason and breaking Mason's grip on his right wrist Tpr. Cope is able to draw his firearm and discharge his weapon at Mason three times. Mason still had his firearm in his right hand and was still fighting, trying to shoot Tpr. Cope when Tpr. Cope shot him.

Tpr. Cope clearly drew his firearm, but Mason was a danger to Tpr. Cope whom Mason tried to murder, and Mason was a danger to innocent bystanders, like [redacted] and other citizens who drove by or lived in the area. Even when confronted with a firearm Tpr. Cope first attempted to disarm Mason instead of immediately drawing his own firearm, even though his own life was in danger. Tpr. Cope did not violate MSP's policy on Firearms.

MSP has a policy in effect Official Order 05-08 Post-Use of Force Medial Care which states,

05-08-01 POST-INCIDENT MEDICAL CARE[16]

> A. Enforcement members using force on a subject shall make medical treatment available to that subject as soon as possible whenever:

[16] The reminder of Official Order 05-08 was not included in this memorandum as it pertained to the removal of Electro-Muscular Disruption (EMD) Technology Device Probes.

(1) The subject requests medical treatment.

(2) The subject complains of injury or continued pain.

(3) Any enforcement member observes or suspects injury to a subject.

(4) The subject does not substantially recover from the effects of a use of force within a reasonable and expected period of time.

(5) The subject displays any behavior that would indicate to a reasonable person that the subject may be ill or injured.

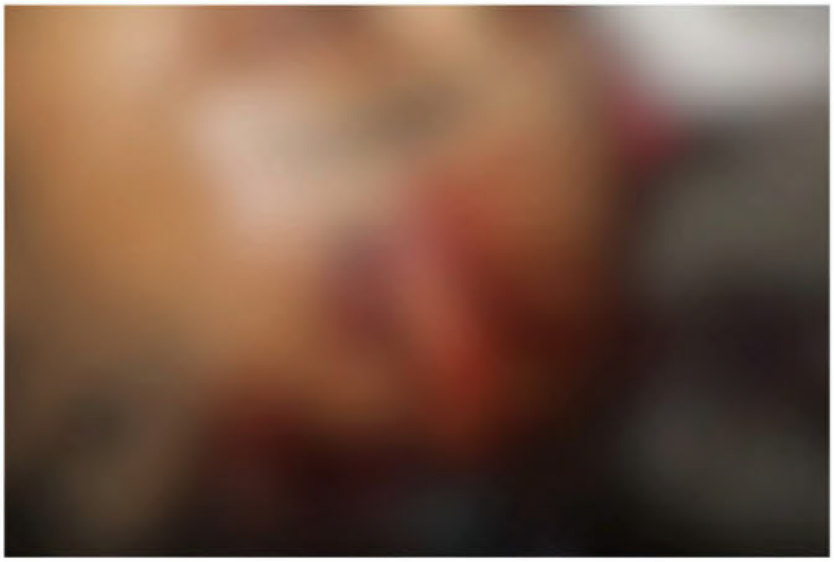
Tpr. Cope did not author a report and was walking in circles briefly at the scene immediately after the shooting before he was rushed to [redacted] Hospital and did not begin lifesaving medical care on Mason. However, for forty-seven seconds Tpr. Cope was fighting Stephen Mason for his life, then in the next fifty seconds Tpr. Cope has been shot three times in the chest area, was bleeding from all three wounds, after being shot he continued to fight with Mason who was still trying to shoot Tpr. Cope with the live rounds remining in his revolver, and Tpr. Cope then discharged his weapon three times into Mason, which would be a shocking event for anyone. Tpr. Cope then called in on his radio twice for assistance after being shot, took approximately fifteen seconds to get untangled from Mason with his radio cord, had to remove the revolver from Mason's right hand to disarm him, and kicked it away multiple times from where Mason is on the ground, and is pacing around the scene, mostly in a circle saying "I'm hit. I'm hit" to the civilian [redacted] who has approached him and over his radio. It appears from the dashcam video with the audio that Tpr. Cope is in shock.

After he was shot and Tpr. Cope removed the revolver out of Mason's right hand, and after he was finished extricating his radio cord from underneath Mason's body, the only movement by Mason was his left forearm that had been up in the air starting at the elbow from where he was grasping Tpr. Cope's right wrist[17] and Mason's forearm slowly drops to the ground. Nothing else on Stephen Wangara-Mason's body moved or twitched after Tpr. Cope discharged his weapon; his chest did not rise or fall; even viewing the video on a large screen this writer did not discern any movement by Mason. Tpr. Cope called in on his radio while leaning over and looking directly at Mason, "Suspect is down. One to the head, multiple to the body". (Tpr. Cope dashcam 19:54:58). Tpr. Cope was still breathing very heavily at this point. Soon other officers

[17] Mason was grabbing Tpr. Cope's right wrist to prevent him from pulling his firearm from his holster and he was successful until Tpr. Cope broke Mason's grip.

arrived on scene and Tpr. Cope is the rushed to the hospital by Detroit Police Officers at 19:55:25. EMS has not yet arrived.

It is clear from the photographs and absolute lack of movement after the shooting that Stephen Wangara-Mason was immediately deceased. According to the autopsy the bullet to the forehead's wound track proceeded "through the frontal bone, dura, brain left frontal lobe, brain right temporal lobe, brain occipital lobe, dura, occipital bone, and ended in the right occipital scalp. Associated with this injury was multiple comminuted fractures of the basilar skull, scalp hemorrhages (frontal, occipital), and diffuse subarachnoid hemorrhage of the brain. The wound track was front to back, left to right, and downward."



On September 16, 2025 this writer spoke with Dr. Vasudevan Mahligam, Assistant Wayne County Medical Examiner[18], and it was the opinion of Dr. Mahligam that while the cause of death was multiple gunshot wounds, the gunshot wound to the head was fatal all by itself. Additionally, the gunshot wound to the neck that "proceeded through the muscle and soft tissue of the neck, posterior cervical vertebrae C3, and ended in the muscle and soft tissue of the right neck" was potentially fatal due to the perforation of the neck and vertebrae. Dr. Mahligam also discussed the third gunshot wound to the abdomen whose wound track "proceeded through the left lateral 9th intercostal space, pancreas, small intestine, abdominal aorta, right kidney, liver, diaphragm, right posterior 10th intercostal space, and ended in the soft tissue of the back. Associated with this wound was 500 ml of bloody fluid in the abdomen, 600 ml of bloody fluid in the right chest, and a contusion on the right back overlying the subjacent bullet. The wound track was from front to back, left to right, and upward." Dr. Mahligam stated the gunshot wound to the abdomen was also

[18] Dr. Vasudevan Mahligam was a Forensic Pathology Fellow at the time he assisted with the autopsy of Stephen Wangara-Mason on May 17, 2025.

potentially fatal since this injury caused Mason to lose such a significant amount of blood.

No medical treatment offered by Tpr. Cope could have revived Mason. Tpr. Cope immediately radioed that he had been hit and seconds later radioed that the suspect was down and requested EMS. The EMS crew that responded consisted of a paramedic, an emergency first responder and two emergency medical technicians. They arrived at 19:59:33 and were with Stephen Mason six seconds later. The EMS narrative states upon arrival they found the patient with "obvious signs of death". "PT had a GSW to the head with brain matter present, pt did have a GSW to the stomach as well, no CPR was initiated and a time of death was given at 19:59hrs 05/16/25. PT was cold to the touch in a warm environment as well,..".Under the category "Resuscitation attempted by EMS" the response by the EMS team was "Not attempted – considered futile".

The futility of Tpr. Cope providing medical assistance is provided by the medical evidence. Dr. Mahligam stated that the gunshot wound to the head was fatal by itself and the gunshot wound to the abdomen was "potentially fatal due to the extreme amount of blood Mason lost. Tpr. Cope first shot was at 19:53:14 and the EMS team arrived at 19:59 and described Mason as exhibiting "obvious signs of death" and that he was "*was cold to the touch in a warm environment*". After just six minutes he lost so much blood he was cold to the touch.

Between the lack of movement immediately upon being shot, the autopsy report, the photographs of Stephen Wangara-Mason, the statements of Dr. Mahligam, the report by the EMS crew, his brain being perforated which was a fatal injury, his body lacking blood where it needed it, Stephen Wangara-Mason was dead before anyone could have assisted him. Any attempt by Tpr. Cope to provide medical treatment would have been pointless and perceived as interfering with the evidence scene. This policy, like all policies, requires some reason and common sense in its application. This policy was not written to address this situation where any reasonable person can see that the injury to Mason was already fatal and no medical treatment that currently exists could bring him back to life. Tpr. Cope leaned over Mason and appeared to be looking for any signs of life soon after the shooting but saw none as he called in over his radio for assistance. In addition, Tpr. Cope himself was in no condition to render aid as he himself needed immediate medical assistance and was admitted to [redacted] Hospital. In this case there was no reason to attempt life saving measures and therefore this policy was not violated by Tpr. Cope.

SELF DEFENSE AND DEFENSE OF OTHERS

In order for the State to consider charges against Tpr. Justin Cope, an evaluation of self-defense and defense of others must be made since there is evidence of self-defense in the videos, witness statements, and physical evidence in this case. Additionally, throughout the fight civilians drive their vehicles mere feet from where Mason and Tpr. Cope are fighting over Mason's revolver in the adjoining lane and could have been accidentally shot.

- These two stills show two of the several cars that drove right alongside the fight.

As soon as Mason exits the driver side door of his truck Tpr. Cope asks, "What are you reaching for?". (Tpr. Cope BWC video 19:51:59) but since the video is behind Tpr. Cope you cannot see Mason's reach that Tpr. Cope is referencing, but the dashcam does catch a handgun falling from Mason's right waist-lap area, concealed by the white towel, as the handgun and white towel fall to the ground at the same second.

Mason then immediately lunges for the revolver and

Tpr. Cope starts struggling to keep Mason away from his revolver. According to eyewitness [redacted] Cope is trying to arrest Mason at first. Tpr. Cope issues Mason two verbal warnings even as Tpr. Cope tries to wrestle the revolver away from Mason. Between the Tpr. Cope's BWC, dashcam and their audio it is clear that Mason gains control over his Smith and Wesson .38 revolver and shoots Tpr. Cope three times in four seconds; twice at point blank range in the chest and once in the clavicle (beginning at 19:512:46). Even after Mason uses deadly force against Tpr. Cope, he tries to disarm Mason. It is only after Mason uses deadly force against Tpr. Cope by shooting him three times that Tpr. Cope pulls out his service weapon and then only after a struggle where Mason is still trying to shoot Tpr. Cope, and Tpr. Cope is fighting to prevent Mason from shooting him again that Tpr. Cope is able to pull his service weapon out of its holster and return fire to save his own life (beginning at 19:53:14).

Tpr. Cope's use of Force and Use of Deadly Force to protect himself was objectively reasonable. Mason not only threatened to use deadly force against him, but Mason used deadly force against Tpr. Cope before he ever drew his firearm. Additionally, there were numerous civilians in the area Tpr. Cope was authorized to use force to protect. Witness [redacted] stayed in his car right behind Tpr. Cope's car until the fight was over, witness [redacted] said she stayed further behind [redacted] in her vehicle, and four cars drove in the adjoining lane of traffic within four or five feet of where Mason and Tpr. Cope were struggling in the street as Mason tried to regain control over his gun. Anyone of those individuals were in danger of a stray bullet. The fight occurred on the M-10 service drive, but the location appears to be a short distance away from a residential neighborhood where the homes seem well kept and occupied, meaning a stray bullet would place anyone in or around those homes at risk as well. Tpr. Cope was justified in his use of deadly force to protect himself and others in this instance.

Right to Self Defense and No Duty to Retreat

The Michigan Model Criminal Jury Instructions state in M Crim JI 7.22 Use of Nondeadly Force in Self-Defense or Defense of Others that "a person has the right to use force to defend [himself] under certain circumstances. If a person acts in lawful self-defense, his actions are justified, and he is not guilty of [a crime]. M. Crim. JI 7.22. In making this determination one "should consider all the evidence" and should consider the following three rules, judging the individual's actions according to how the circumstances appeared to that individual at the time they acted. The first rule provides that the individual must "have honestly and reasonably believed that [he]

had to use force to protect [himself] from the imminent unlawful use of force by another." *Id.* The individual need not be correct in their evaluation of the danger presented, so long as their belief was honest and reasonable. Second, a person may only use the degree of force that seems necessary at the time, and the individual must have used appropriate force under the circumstances as [he] saw them. In making this determination, one must consider whether the individual knew of another means of protecting himself, but one must also consider "how the excitement of the moment affected the choice [he] made." *Id.* Third, "the right to defend [oneself] only lasts as long as it seems necessary for the purpose of protection." *Id.* Fourth, the individual claiming self-defense must not have acted wrongfully or instigated the assault. *Id. See also, People v. Deason,* 148 Mich. App. 27 (1985) and *Brownell v. People,* 38 Mich. 732 (1878).

The Michigan Model Criminal Jury Instructions also state in M Crim JI 7.20 Burden of Proof-Self-Defense that "The defendant does not have to prove that [he] acted in self-defense. Instead, the prosecutor must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant did not act in self-defense."

Once a defendant raises the issue of self-defense and "satisfies the initial burden of producing some evidence from which a jury could conclude that the elements necessary to establish a prima facie defense of self-defense exist," the prosecution must "exclude the possibility" of self-defense beyond a reasonable doubt. *People v. Dupree,* 486 Mich. 693, 709–710, 788 N.W.2d 399 (2010). "[o]ne who is not the aggressor in an encounter is justified in using a reasonable amount of force against his adversary when he reasonably believes (a) that he is in immediate danger of unlawful bodily harm from his adversary and (b) that the use of such force is necessary to avoid this danger. (citing 2 LaFave, Substantive Criminal Law (2d ed), § 10.4, p. 142.). *Dupree* at 707. A claim of self -defense or defense of others first requires that a defendant has acted in response to an assault. *City of Detroit v Smith*, 235 Mich App 235, 238; 597 NW2d 247, 249 (1999).

There is an additional hurdle for the People to overcome as Tpr. Cope had a legal right to be there and there was no duty Tpr. Cope to retreat away from Mason under the Self Defense Act (SDA). MCL 780.972

> (1) An individual who has not or is not engaged in the commission of a crime at the time he or she uses deadly force may use deadly force against another individual anywhere he or she has the legal right to be with no duty to retreat if either of the following applies:

> (a) The individual honestly and reasonably believes that the use of deadly force is necessary to prevent the imminent death of or imminent great bodily harm to himself or herself or to another individual.

"Section 2 of the SDA removed the traditional common-law duty to retreat, so long as the individual engaging in self-defense or defense of others was not committing or had not committed a crime and had a legal right to be where they were when they used force." *People v. Leffew*, 508 Mich. 625, 641, 975 N.W.2d 896, "[A]side from limiting one's duty to retreat, the statute did not modify or abrogate the common-law defenses of self-defense or defense of others" or the right to use deadly or nondeadly force. *Id.* at 642.

A prosecutor may only charge said individual with a crime arising out of the use of deadly force if the prosecutor can provide evidence "establishing that the individual's actions were not justified." M.C.L. 780.961(1)(2). See also, People v. Guajardo, 300 Mich App 26 (2013) (discussing and upholding Michigan's Self Defense Act and the use of deadly force).

Further, the U.S. Supreme Court has also ruled regarding the right to use deadly force and in particular in the context of police officers use of deadly force. In *Tennessee v. Gardner*, the U.S. Supreme Court stated "[w]here the officer has probably cause to believe that the suspect poses a threat of serious physical harm, either to the officer or to others, it is not constitutionally unreasonable to prevent escape by using deadly force. Thus, if the suspect threatens the officer with a weapon or there is probably cause to believe that he has committed a crime involving the infliction or threatened infliction of serious physical harm, deadly force may be used if necessary to prevent escape, and if, where feasible, some warning has been given." *Tenn. v. Garner*, 471 US 1, 11-12 (1985).

The U.S. Supreme Court also analyzed and ruled on the issue of police use of force in *Graham v. Connor*, 490 US 386 (1989). In *Graham v. Connor*, the Court held that claims alleging police officers have used excessive force must be analyzed under the Fourth Amendment "reasonableness standard" and not under a "substantive due process" approach. Id. at 395. Additionally, "[t]he '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." Id. at 396. In determining whether an officer's actions were reasonable, there must be "allowance for the fact that police

officers are often forced to make split-second judgments – in circumstances that are tense, uncertain, and rapidly evolving…" Id. at 396-97.

Based on all the available evidence Tpr. Justin's Cope's belief that deadly force was necessary was both honest and reasonable under the law. MCL 780.961 and the cited case law prohibits our office from issuing criminal charges in this case where we cannot prove that the use of deadly force was unjustified. Charges against Trooper Justin Cope must be denied.

VI. Conclusion

No charges may be issued against Trooper Justin Cope for his actions on May 16, 2025, in Detroit.

Press release: No.