

State of Connecticut  
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL



Report Regarding  
The Use of Deadly Force by the Connecticut State Police  
On May 13, 2023

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Inspector General

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## *Acknowledgements*

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*Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, Division of State Police, Troop I - Bethany*

## INTRODUCTION

On May 13, 2023, at approximately 5:51 p.m., at or near the exit 15 on-ramp to I-91 in Wallingford, Trooper Joshua Wedge<sup>1</sup> applied a chokehold to Ira Turner<sup>2</sup> while taking Turner into police custody. As required by statute<sup>3</sup>, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) investigated this use of deadly force. The results of the investigation are contained in this report.

The investigation establishes that Trooper Wedge briefly used a chokehold on Turner to force Turner to end the chokehold that he was applying to Trooper Brandon Poirier. I find that Trooper Wedge's use of such force was objectively reasonable and reasonably necessary to defend Trooper Poirier from the use of deadly force against him. It was also justified by Connecticut State Police policy. Such use of a chokehold, however, appears to be contrary to the provisions of Connecticut General Statutes §53a-22(d) that permits the use of a chokehold to defend *oneself* from deadly force but does not authorize the use of a chokehold to defend a third party.<sup>4</sup> On the full record of this case, however, I do not believe that Trooper Wedge's use of force was unjustified.

## INVESTIGATION

### Report of Trooper Brandon Poirier

On Saturday May 13, 2023, at approximately 5:45 p.m., Trooper Brandon Poirier was assigned by Troop I dispatch to the area of I-91 north, exit 13 on a report of a "rolling domestic." Dispatch described the vehicle involved as a red SUV.

Trooper Poirier responded to that location and, one half mile south of exit 14, observed a red Mitsubishi Outlander (CT registration BB53208) traveling in the center lane. Dispatch confirmed that this was the vehicle that the complainant was in. Trooper Poirier attempted to stop the vehicle, but it did not stop. A pursuit ensued north on I-91. At some point, Trooper

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<sup>1</sup> On May 13, 2023, Trooper Joshua Wedge, a Caucasian male, had been a Connecticut State Trooper for two years and four months. He had no disciplinary history.

<sup>2</sup> On May 13, 2023, Ira Turner was a thirty-five-year-old African American male.

<sup>3</sup> As relevant here, General Statutes §51-277a(a)(1) provides: "Whenever a peace officer, in the performance of such officer's duties, uses physical force upon another person and such person dies as a result thereof or uses deadly force, as defined in section 53a-3, upon another person, the Division of Criminal Justice shall cause an investigation to be made and the Inspector General shall have the responsibility of determining whether the use of force by the peace officer was justifiable under section 53a-22."

<sup>4</sup> General Statutes §53a-22 (d) provides: "A peace officer ... is justified in using a chokehold or other method of restraint applied to the neck area or that otherwise impedes the ability to breathe or restricts blood circulation to the brain of another person for the purposes specified in subsection (b) of this section only when he or she reasonably believes such use is necessary to defend himself or herself from the use or imminent use of deadly physical force."

Poirier pulled alongside the vehicle and observed the driver to be a black male with black hair and a goatee. He was wearing a black shirt. He was later identified as Ira Turner.

As they passed exit 14, Trooper Joshua Wedge entered I-91 to assist in the pursuit. Troopers Poirier and Wedge attempted to stop the vehicle using a box-in method. Turner, however, drove onto the right shoulder onto the grass area and was able to escape Trooper Wedge. The pursuit continued up I-91 reaching speeds of up to 95 mph. During a second attempted box in, Turner collided with the rear passenger side of Trooper Poirier's cruiser. At the exit 15 on-ramp, Turner took a U-turn over the grassy area and started to travel the wrong way up the exit 15 on-ramp. Cars driving down the ramp forced Turner to turn around and drive back toward the highway. The vehicle came to a stop in the gore area off the exit 15 on-ramp.

The report continues:

"As the vehicle was stopped, I observed Turner attempting to exit the vehicle. I then strategically placed my push bumper against the driver door to prevent him from exiting the vehicle and running into traffic. As a result, Turner then climbed over his front passenger and exited the vehicle through the front passenger side door. At this point, I had already exited my cruiser. Turner then attempted to lead Troopers on a foot pursuit. I was able to get in front of Turner in an attempt to stop him from fleeing. Turner then intentionally "bull rushed" me tackling me and striking me in the face in the process. As a result, I sustained a laceration to the face. I then "bear-hugged" Turner who was still trying to elude arrest and was actively resisting. I tried to take Turner to the ground but instead we landed on the wire rope guardrail in the right shoulder. I was on top of Turner at this point and did not move until Trooper Wedge came over to assist me due to Turner continuing to actively resist. Trooper Wedge then assisted with handcuffing Turner behind his back. Verbal commands were being given while Turner was on the ground. I told him numerous times to put his hands behind his back and stop resisting but he did not comply. After a brief struggle, I took positive control of Turner's arms, and he was placed under arrest using double locked handcuffs that were checked for proper clearance."

Turner complained of difficulty breathing and EMS was called to the scene. Turner's name was checked through a police database and Troopers learned that there was a full no-contact protective order with Witness 1, the front seat passenger. Turner told Trooper Poirier that the two juveniles inside the vehicle were his children. He further said the reason that he did not stop was because he knew that he had "messed up" and was "already in trouble." When EMS arrived, Turner complained of chest pain. They transported him to Midstate Medical Center in Meriden. Upon his release from the hospital, Turner was transported to Troop I where he was charged with Kidnapping Second Degree, Violation of a Protective Order and related charges. He was held on a \$250,000 bond.

## Report of Trooper Joshua Wedge

Trooper Joshua Wedge was off duty when he heard Troop I dispatch Trooper Poirier to the area of I-91 exit 12 on a report of rolling domestic disturbance in a red SUV. He was in his police cruiser and entered I-91 at the exit 14 on-ramp to assist. He observed Trooper Poirier traveling behind a red SUV. Trooper Wedge drove his cruiser ahead of the SUV and slowed down in an attempt to box in the SUV. The SUV passed Trooper Wedge on the right and continued northbound. During a second attempted box in, the SUV collided with Trooper Poirier's cruiser.

At the area of the exit 15 on ramp, the SUV abruptly slowed driving through the right lane and shoulder onto the exit 15 on-ramp traveling in the wrong direction. Trooper Wedge could see that the operator was a black male, and the passenger was a black female. When the vehicle came to a stop, Trooper Poirier placed his cruiser against the driver's door to prevent the operator from exiting.

The report continues:

"The operator (later identified as Ira Turner ...) then exited the vehicle through the passenger side and began to run south up the exit 15 on-ramp. Trooper Poirier and I engaged in a foot pursuit as his reckless behavior continued to demonstrate he would not comply with our orders. Trooper Poirier caught and attempted to bring Turner to the ground, and he swung his arms towards him in an aggressive manner striking Trooper Poirier in the face. Turner continued forward towards the wire rope guardrail when I caught up to them. I lifted Turner's legs out from underneath him in an attempt to safely lower him to the ground. Turner continued to resist and refused to put his hands behind his back as he straddled the guardrail, placing Trooper Poirier in a head lock. Due to Trooper Poirier being placed in a dangerous position coupled with being off duty and having none of my issued equipment<sup>5</sup>, I reached around Turner's neck with my forearm in an attempt to free Poirier from his grip. Once Trooper Poirier was freed from his dangerous position, I assisted in lifting him back off the guardrail, guiding him to the ground. Trooper Poirier and I continued to struggle with Turner as he refused to put his hands behind his back. Trooper Poirier gave many verbal instructions which Turner ignored. After approximately one minute of resisting, we were able to get Turner's hands behind his back and place him into custody. While in custody Turner stated, "I knew this was going to fucking happen." When I asked Turner why he did not stop for us he stated, "it didn't even matter, this was going to happen no matter what."

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<sup>5</sup> Such issued equipment would have included a taser and O.C. spray.

## **Witness 1 Statement**

Witness 1, the mother of Ira Turner's two children, gave a statement to Trooper Poirier on May 13, 2023. In that statement Witness 1 relates that on May 13, 2023, at approximately 5:10 p.m., Ira Turner came to her house and picked up Witness 1 and her two children to take them to a birthday party in Orange. Turner was operating his mother's red Mitsubishi Outlander. While traveling on I-95, Turner began to drive erratically. Witness 1 ascribed this driving to a conversation she and Turner had earlier in the day about her having a boyfriend. When Turner started to get upset, Witness 1 asked him to calm down. Turner missed the exit for the birthday party and drove onto I-91 north and continued to drive erratically. At one point, Witness 1 told Turner to pull the vehicle over because they were going in the wrong direction, but he did not stop.

The statement continues:

"I tried to call his mom to have him calm down, but she could not do anything because he did not want to talk. That's when I called State Police for help because I was scared for both mine and my kids' lives. After we passed Exit 13 on I-91 North, I observed a State Trooper behind us with his lights and sirens on. Turner refused to stop the vehicle. Turner said some stuff along the line of why would you do this to me? I am not going to jail? I'm going to take you and the kids with me! When Turner saw police, he seemed out of it. Turner then led the police on a pursuit trying to get away. As we were traveling, I observed a State Trooper in the right lane directly in front of us and a Trooper on the driver side of us trying to slow us down twice. When the Troopers did this, Turner entered the right shoulder and drove on the grass to get away. When Turner got to the Exit 15 on ramp to I-91 N, Turner decided to go up the ramp the wrong way to get away from the police. I then observed a Trooper block Turner causing him to get back onto the highway. At this point, I do not know what Turner was doing. When Turner entered back onto the highway, we were traveling very slow, that is when I took the keys out of the ignition disabling the vehicle. When the police came to stop Turner, he tried to run out of the driver door and run from police. The Trooper pulled [his] push bumper near the door so that he could not escape. Turner then tried to enter out the front passenger side in which I was sitting. That is when State Police were able to tackle him and bring him to the ground."

## **Ira Turner Interview**

OIG inspectors interviewed Ira Turner on November 13, 2023. The report of that interview states:

"Mr. Turner stated he only remembers being involved in a heated argument with his girlfriend as he was driving to Chuck E. Cheese. Mr. Turner states he remembers being handcuffed by a State Police Officer and then waking up in the hospital. Mr. Turner said he took some Aleve and two

shots of Hennessy liquor before the incident. Mr. Turner said he had pain [and] was treated for pain to his side but was not diagnosed with any injury or illness at the hospital.”

During the recorded interview, Turner indicated that he thought that he had “blacked out.” He recalled seeing a State Trooper in front of him who said, “What are you doing?” That is the last thing that he remembers. He also indicated that he thought that he had sustained a broken rib, but nothing showed on the X-ray. He had no recollection of a police pursuit or subsequent struggle, other than being handcuffed.

After being taken into custody, Turner was transported by ambulance to Midstate Medical Center in Meriden. The ambulance note indicates that Turner complained of anxiety and mild chest discomfort. Turner was admitted to the hospital on May 13, 2023, at 6:51 p.m. and discharged the next day (May 14) at 1:16 p.m. He underwent cardiac and trauma evaluations, both of which were negative. His toxicological screen was positive for cannabis only and he was medically cleared for discharged.

At the hospital, the principal focus became his level of anxiety, depression, and related emotional issues.

## **Digital Evidence**

A review of Trooper Poirier’s body worn camera (BWC) shows the following:

1:10<sup>6</sup>-- Trooper Poirier is speaking with Trooper Wedge on a mobile phone.

1:50 – Trooper Poirier sees the red SUV.

4:00 – Troop I dispatch advises Trooper Poirier that the woman in the red SUV sees him behind them.

4:12 – Trooper Poirier broadcasts that the individual is not stopping.

4:52 – Trooper Poirier and Trooper Wedge attempt to box in the red SUV.

5:20 – Trooper Poirier broadcast that “he’s going off road.” He also broadcasts the plate number for the red SUV.

5:46 – The red SUV collides with Trooper Poirier’s cruiser.

5:48 – Trooper Poirier broadcasts “he hit me.”

6:27 – Trooper Poirier broadcasts “We’re passing 15 going 90. He’s in the center lane.”

7:13 – The red SUV turns right. Trooper Poirier follows.

7:24 – Trooper Poirier stops his cruiser next to the red SUV’s driver’s door. Trooper Poirier exits his cruiser.

7:30 – Turner running.

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<sup>6</sup> All time notations are elapsed time from the start of the recording.



7:32 – Turner collides with Trooper Poirier knocking his BWC off his uniform and onto the pavement.

7:33 – The camera records Turner restraining Poirier in a chokehold and Trooper Wedge applying a chokehold to Turner to get him to release Trooper Poirier.

8:04 – Trooper Poirier, Trooper Wedge, and Turner move out of camera view.

12:25 – Trooper Poirier puts his camera back on.

12:55 – Turner is seen on the ground handcuffed. He is describing his relationship with Witness 1.

16:45 – Wallingford Fire Department arrives and one of the firefighters talks to Turner.

20:21 – Hunter’s Ambulance arrives.

The balance of the recording shows Trooper Poirier speaking to Witness 1 and obtaining information from her.

To view that portion of Trooper Poirier’s BWC depicting the struggle, click [here](#).

## Scene

There was no processing of the scene other than photographs taken by Trooper Poirier.







[Red Mitsubishi]





[Trooper Poirier's cruiser]



[Trooper Poirier's injury]

### **Use of Force Review**

On August 9, 2023, Trooper First Class Davis Tharas submitted a Use of Force review regarding this case. The report summarizes Trooper Poirier body worn camera footage describing the pursuit and the red SUV's leaving the highway, the actions of Witness 1 in

removing the keys from the ignition, and Trooper Poirier pulling his cruiser up to the driver's door preventing the suspect from exiting using that door. The report continues:

"Trooper Poirier exited his cruiser and as he ran around the back of his cruiser towards the subject vehicle, he met the male operator suspect running from the passenger side of the car. The suspect dipped his shoulder and struck Trooper Poirier and began fighting with Trooper Poirier, punching Trooper Poirier in the face. The fight went to the guardrail and during the fight the suspect put Trooper Poirier in a chokehold, wrapping his arm around Trooper Poirier's neck on three separate occasions. Trooper Wedge was off duty and in plain clothes attire, armed with his duty firearm only, rushed to the aid of Trooper Poirier, who was actively being choked and assaulted. Trooper Wedge used a chokehold to protect Trooper Poirier's life. This chokehold rendered the suspect temporarily unconscious, and he was dragged to the ground. As the suspect was brought to the ground, he regained consciousness and continued fighting the troopers until they were ultimately able to secure him into handcuffs."

Relying on provisions of the Connecticut State Police Administration and Operations Manual, Trooper First Class Tharas noted that the policy allows for the use of deadly force to defend oneself or a third person. Trooper Tharas concluded that "Trooper Wedge #896 utilized a choke hold (deadly force) to assist Trooper Poirier, meeting the subject with the same force."<sup>7</sup>

## FINDINGS

1. On May 13, 2023, at approximately 5:45 p.m., Troop I dispatch advised Trooper Brandon Poirier of a "rolling domestic" involving a red SUV.
2. Trooper Poirier located the vehicle traveling north on I-91 in the area of exit 13.
3. Trooper Joshua Wedge, who was off duty and in plain clothes, offered to assist Trooper Poirier in the stop of the red SUV.
4. While traveling on I-91, the two troopers attempted on two occasions to box in the red SUV and bring it to a controlled stop, but on each occasion the red SUV was able to evade their efforts by (1) driving around them on the grass and (2) colliding with Trooper Poirier's cruiser.
5. In the vicinity of exit 15 on-ramp, the red SUV drove off I-91 and proceeded the wrong way up the ramp. Upon encountering oncoming vehicles on the ramp, the red SUV turned around

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<sup>7</sup> The report does not mention the fact that General Statutes §52a-22(d) does not authorize a chokehold to defend a third party.

and headed back toward I-91. At this point, a passenger in the red SUV (Witness 1) removed the keys from the ignition causing the red SUV to stop.

6. Trooper Poirier followed the red SUV off the highway and stopped his cruiser immediately next to the red SUV's driver's door, preventing the subject from exiting. Trooper Poirier exited his cruiser and ran toward the red SUV.

7. The driver of the red SUV, Ira Turner, exited the red SUV from the passenger's side and ran from the vehicle.

8. In the area at the rear of the red SUV, Turner ran into Trooper Poirier and commenced fighting with him. Near the guardrail to the entrance ramp, Turner was able to apply a chokehold on Trooper Poirier's neck. At this point Trooper Wedge arrived on scene and, in an effort to get Turner to release the chokehold on Trooper Poirier, used a chokehold on Turner. The Troopers were able to get Turner into custody and medical aid was summoned.

9. Hunter's Ambulance transported Turner to Midstate Medical Center. There, after examination and testing, he was determined to be without physical injury.

## **LAW**

The use of force by a police officer is governed by General Statutes §53a-22. The version of that statute in effect on May 13, 2023, in relevant part, provides:

(b) [A] peace officer ... is justified in using physical force upon another person when and to the extent that he or she reasonably believes such use to be necessary to: (1) Effect an arrest or prevent the escape from custody of a person whom he or she reasonably believes to have committed an offense, unless he or she knows that the arrest or custody is unauthorized; or (2) defend himself or herself or a third person from the use or imminent use of physical force while effecting or attempting to effect an arrest or while preventing or attempting to prevent an escape.

(c) (1) ... a peace officer ... is justified in using *deadly physical force* upon another person for the purposes specified in subsection (b) of this section only when his or her actions are objectively reasonable under the circumstances, and:

(A) He or she reasonably believes such to be necessary to defend himself or herself or a third person from the use or imminent use of deadly physical force; ....

The statute further provides:

“For the purpose of evaluating whether the actions of a peace officer ... are reasonable under subdivision (1) of this subsection, factors to be considered include, but are not limited to, whether (A) the person upon whom deadly force was used possessed or appeared to possess a deadly weapon, (B) the peace officer ... engaged in reasonable de-escalation measures prior to using deadly physical force, and (C) any conduct of the peace officer ... led to an increased risk of an occurrence of the situation that precipitated the use of force.

(d) A peace officer ... is justified in using a chokehold or other method of restraint applied to the neck area or that otherwise impedes the ability to breathe or restricts blood circulation to the brain of another person for the purposes specified in subsection (b) of this section only when he or she reasonably believes such use to be necessary *to defend himself or herself* from the use or imminent use of deadly force.” (emphasis added).

Accordingly, a police officer is justified in using deadly physical force upon another person when the officer reasonably believes such force to be necessary to defend the officer or a third person from the use or imminent use of deadly physical force. “Deadly physical force” means “physical force that can be reasonably expected to cause death or serious physical injury.” General Statutes § 53a-3(5). “Serious physical injury” means “physical injury which creates a substantial risk of death, or which causes serious disfigurement, serious impairment of health or serious loss or impairment of the function of any bodily organ.” General Statutes §53a-3(4).

Contrary to the general provisions of §53a-22, a police officer is justified in using a chokehold only when necessary to defend himself or herself from the imminent use of deadly force. §53a-22(d). Subsection (d) makes no provision for the defense of a third party.

The reasonableness of a police officer’s belief under § 53a-22 is evaluated pursuant to a subjective-objective formulation. *State v. Smith*, 73 Conn. App. 173, 185, 807 A.2d 500, cert. denied 262 Conn. 923, 812 A.2d 865 (2002). Under this test, the first question is whether, on the basis of all of the evidence, the police officer in fact honestly believed that deadly force was necessary to defend himself/herself or a third person. *Id.* If it is determined that the police officer honestly believed that deadly force was necessary, the second part of the test asks whether the police officer’s honest belief was reasonable from the perspective of a reasonable police officer in the officer’s circumstances. *Id.* at 198.

The United States Supreme Court has explained this test as follows: “The ‘reasonableness’ of a particular use of force must be judged from the perspective of a reasonable officer on scene rather than with the 20/20 vision of hindsight. ... [T]he calculus of reasonableness must embody allowance of the fact that police officers are often forced to make split-second decisions—in circumstances that are tense, uncertain, and rapidly evolving—about the amount of force that is necessary in a particular situation.” *Graham v. Connor*, 490 U.S. 386, 396-97, 109 S. Ct. 1865, 104 L. Ed. 2d 443 (1989).



## ANALYSIS

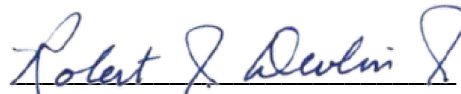
Trooper Wedge used a chokehold on Turner to defend Trooper Poirier from Turner's use of a chokehold on Trooper Poirier. In my view, this use of deadly force was objectively reasonable. It was also authorized by Connecticut's general law of self-defense. See General Statutes §53a-19 ("a person is justified in using reasonable physical force upon another person to defend himself or a third person from what he reasonably believes to be the use or imminent use of physical force"). (emphasis added). Such force was also authorized by the Connecticut State Police Administration and Policy Manual. See Section #13.04.01, subsection G ("A trooper is justified in using deadly physical force upon another person only when his or her actions are objectively reasonable under the circumstances, and he or she reasonably believes deadly force is necessary to defend himself or herself or a third person from the use or imminent use of deadly force"). (emphasis added).

Trooper Wedge's use of a chokehold, however, was contrary to the wording of §53a-22(d) which permits the use of a chokehold to defend oneself but makes no mention of defense of a third party. One wonders if this omission was intentional. As written, the statute would permit a trooper to shoot a suspect to defend a third party, but not permit the trooper to apply a chokehold. It is hard to imagine that the legislature intended such a result. Given this confusion in the law, I do not believe that §53a-22 should be construed in such a way as to deem Trooper Wedge's actions unjustified. Clarification of the statute by the legislature seems warranted. See Addendum.

## CONCLUSION

The investigation establishes that Trooper Joshua Wedge used deadly force against Ira Turner to free Trooper Brandon Poirier from Turner's use of a chokehold against him. I conclude that Trooper Wedge's use of force was justified under Connecticut law. The Office of the Inspector General will take no further action on this matter.

Submitted, this 8th day of May 2024.



ROBERT J. DEVLIN, JR.  
INSPECTOR GENERAL

## **ADDENDUM**

### **Recommendation**

The Office of Inspector General intends to recommend that the General Assembly consider amending General Statutes §53a-22(d) to expressly indicate whether a police officer may use a chokehold to defend a third party from the use or imminent use of deadly force. The OIG intends to further recommend that the statute be amended to permit the defense of a third party.