

COUNTY OF STARK

STARK COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
130 W. MAIN STREET • P.O. BOX 476  
TOULON, IL 61483-0476



GENERAL OFFICE  
309/286-3221  
309/286-7221 FAX

CAROLINE BORDEN CAMPION  
STATE'S ATTORNEY  
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**STARK COUNTY STATE'S ATTORNEY'S OFFICE STATEMENT REGARDING OFFICER INVOLVED  
SHOOTING ON FEBRUARY 18, 2023**

The Stark County State's Attorney's Office has completed its review of the death of Rodney Williams that occurred when officers served an arrest warrant issued for Williams on charges of Aggravated Assault. This investigation entailed reviewing all reports, body camera footage, lab reports, audio recordings and all other documents prepared by the Illinois State Police in its investigation. The following statement details the investigation and the determination that the shooting of Williams, done while Williams was striking an officer with a machete, was legally justified by officers of the Henry County Special Operations Squad to prevent death or great bodily harm to others.

**I. FEBRUARY 17, 2023 - ARREST WARRANT ISSUED**

On February 17, 2023, charges for Aggravated Assault were filed against Williams in Stark County Circuit Court. Upon filing charges, a Stark County Deputy provided sworn testimony to the presiding judge as follows:

1. Per a statement from Williams' landlord, P.P., P.P. went to Williams' apartment to examine door damage and deliver a note to Williams. While knocking on the door, Williams came "charging" at P.P. in a "crazy state of mind," holding a machete and yelling:

"I'm going to kill you and I'm going to cut off your \*\*\* head."

P.P. left "in fear of his life."

2. Law enforcement had previous contact with Williams on February 10, 2023. On this date, Stark County deputies responded to his apartment for a wellness check after being contacted by family members. Medical personnel arrived in case Williams needed medical assistance, and they remained outside. Deputies entered Williams' apartment, and determined Williams was in his bedroom. Williams would not come out and began swinging a machete out his bedroom window near where emergency personnel were located.

After receiving this sworn testimony, the presiding judge found probable cause for the charges, issued an arrest warrant with no-knock authority, and ordered law enforcement to confiscate any weapons at the apartment.

Due to Williams' threats and knowing him to have a machete, Stark County officers coordinated with the Henry County Special Operations Squad to arrest Williams. The Henry County Special Operations Squad includes officers from Henry County Sheriff's Department, Stark County Sheriff's Department, Kewanee Police Department, and Galva Police Department.

## **II. FEBRUARY 18, 2023**

On February 18, 2023 the Henry County Special Operations Squad arrived at approximately 6:00 a.m. at Williams' apartment, located in a residential neighborhood in Toulon, Illinois. While the team was outside the door and before they could enter, they observed Williams through the glass porch front door. He was yelling and holding a machete in a cocked back position.

Officers called out to him the following: they were the police, open the door, come outside, and have his hands up. Williams did not comply, turned and ran towards the back of his apartment. Officers again called out that they were the police and to come out with his hands up. Williams did not respond.

The team entered the apartment, and officers called out again to Williams that they were the police and to come out with his hands up. Williams did not respond.

Officers then heard banging and hammering noises coming from a room located on the right side of the hallway in the back of the apartment. Officers believed Williams was barricading himself into this room and fortifying the door. The rest of the house was cleared by officers as they went through the apartment towards the room.

Officers took positions outside the room, with team members located around the door and down the hallway towards the front of the apartment. Officers again identified themselves as the police. Officers called out to Williams by name, told him he was under arrest, to come out of his room, and put his weapon down. Williams did not comply with those orders.

After Williams failed to come out of the room, officers breached the door. Once the door was breached, Williams charged at the first officer he encountered, a Henry County Deputy, who was standing directly in front of the room door with a protective shield. Williams charged wielding the machete in an up and down slashing manner, striking the deputy's shield multiple times hard enough to damage the shield designed to sustain gun-fire.

While Williams was striking this deputy's shield, officers ordered him several times to drop the machete. The deputy pushed back with his shield, attempting to disarm Williams, but struggled to keep the machete from slashing him as Williams continued to strike. The deputy began to lose balance and Williams grabbed the deputy's shield, pulling it down exposing the deputy's upper torso and attempted to slash him again. At this point, shots were fired by this deputy, another Henry County deputy and a Kewanee police officer.

Medical personnel then entered the apartment. Williams was taken to the hospital, where he passed away. An autopsy confirmed cause of death was multiple gunshot wounds.

Officers recovered other weapons at the scene: a short-handled axe by the front door, a short-handled pick by the patio door, and a black knife in the corner of the couch.

## **III. ANALYSIS**

### **A. Officers Entry Into Williams' Apartment Was Necessary for the Arrest**

Under Illinois law, all necessary and reasonable force may be used to enter into any building or property to make an authorized arrest. 725 ILCS 5/107-5 (d). If police have an arrest warrant for a defendant and the place of arrest is the defendant's residence, police may enter the home if they reasonably believe the defendant is there. *People v. Sain*, 122 Ill. App. 3d 646, 649, 461 N.E.2d 1043, 1046 (1984). An officer may break open a door or window of any building in which the person to be arrested is or is reasonable believed to be, if the officer is refused admittance after he or she has announced his or her authority and purpose. *People v. Sain*, 122 Ill. App. 3d 646, 649, 461 N.E.2d 1043, 1046 (1984).

In this instance, officers had authority to enter Williams' apartment. The officers had an arrest warrant for Williams and confirmed he was in his apartment. Officers then identified themselves as the police, ordered him to put the weapon down and come outside. Williams did not comply with their commands and ran into the back of his apartment, leaving officers with no option but to enter the apartment to arrest him. Williams next barricaded himself in his room and did not comply with commands to come out and drop his weapon. Officers consequently had authority to breach the room's door to arrest Williams.

**B. Officers' Shooting Was Justified to Prevent Death or Great Bodily Harm**

A peace officer is justified in using force likely to cause death or great bodily harm when he "reasonably believes, based on the totality of the circumstances, that such force is necessary to prevent death or great bodily harm to himself or another." 720 ILCS 5/7-5(a).

In this case, the deputy was standing right outside the room door and ready to arrest Williams, who refused to come out of the room and was fortifying the door to prevent entry. Once the door was breached, Williams ran towards the officer and attempted to slash him multiple times with the machete, hitting the deputy's shield. Officers continued to order Williams to drop the weapon, but Williams did not comply as the deputy tried to disarm Williams.

Body camera video shows that Williams' momentum caused the deputy to lose his balance, as Williams attempted to slash the deputy by grabbing his shield and pulling it down. This deputy was then knocked backwards, which exposed other team members as they were within feet of Williams. At that point, lethal force was necessary to prevent death or great bodily harm.

The shooting of Williams in this case was justified to prevent death or great bodily harm to the deputy and other officers enforcing the arrest warrant. When shots were fired by law enforcement, Williams had pulled down the deputy's shield and was moments away from physically slashing the deputy. The threat to the deputy of death or great bodily harm was imminent as the next attempted slashing would likely have been successful. Overall, the officers' actions were legally justified, reasonable and necessary to protect the health and safety of the officers, the community of Toulon and citizens of Stark County.

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