



Press Release For Immediate Release

August 26th, 2021 at 1:30 pm

On August 26th, 2021 at 9:00 am, the Jackson County Grand Jury met to consider the officer-involved shooting and criminal charges regarding the incident involving Aurelio Escobar. The incident under consideration occurred on August 11th, 2021, when three law enforcement officers returned fire and struck Mr. Escobar, who refused to follow law enforcement commands and had fired his gun at those officers.

The Grand Jury was asked to consider two separate issues. First, whether the action of the involved officer was justified as a lawful use of deadly physical force. Oregon law provides that a police officer may use deadly physical force against another person when it is objectively reasonable, under the totality of circumstances known to the peace officer, to believe that the person poses an imminent threat of death or serious physical injury to the peace officer or to a third person, and the use of deadly physical force is necessary to defend the peace officer or a third person from the imminent threat of death or serious physical injury (2020 Special Session 2, House Bill 4301, Chapter 3, Section 8). The second issue for the Grand Jury was if there is sufficient evidence to hold over the suspect on the submitted criminal charges.

In deciding the case, the Grand Jury heard testimony from several witnesses to include the three law enforcement officers who fired, other officers directly involved in the pursuit of Mr. Escobar, the owner of the stolen car, and other officers involved in the investigation. Oregon State Police was the lead agency on the case, and was assisted by members of the Major Assault and Death Investigation Unit (MADIU). The MADIU team is comprised of detectives from the following agencies: Oregon State Police, Medford Police, Jackson County Sheriff, and Central Point Police.

Officers Identified:

Officer J. Doney has been with the Medford Police Department for approximately twelve and a half years, and is assigned to Patrol Team Eight. He is also a Field Training Officer for newly hired officers.

Sergeant B. Weaver has been with the Jackson County Sheriff's Department for six years and nine months, and is assigned as a Patrol Sergeant for Team Three. He is also part of the negotiator's team and a member of the US Marshall's Fugitive Task Force. Prior to his employment with the Sheriff's Department, he was a patrol officer with Ashland Police Department for approximately three years.

Deputy B. Hegdahl has been with the Jackson County Sheriff's Department for one year and eight months, and is assigned to Patrol Team Three. He is also a K-9 handler. Prior to his employment with the Sheriff's Department, he was a patrol officer with Ashland Police Department for over four years.

Testimony and Evidence Presented to the Grand Jury:

On August 11, 2021, at approximately 6:50 am, an attempt to locate (ATL) was put out over police radio traffic for a vehicle involved in an armed carjacking in the Canyonville area that had happened about thirty minutes prior. It was communicated that the car was a silver Volkswagen CC with California plate 6XRN608, and was heading southbound on Interstate-5, the driver of this vehicle would later be identified as Aurelio Escobar (DOB 8/23/95). Two Central Point Police vehicles positioned themselves on Interstate 5 watching for the previously mentioned car. At approximately 7:07 am, a Central Point officer at mile marker 33 saw what he believed to be the silver Volkswagen. The officer pulled onto the freeway southbound and caught up to the car, and confirmed it was the correct car. At that time, the officer activated his lights and sirens, and speeds increased to approximately 100 miles per hour. The Volkswagen started passing other vehicles on the shoulder of the freeway near exit 30 and continued southbound. Sheriff Deputy Hegdahl and other law enforcement officers joined the pursuit on Interstate 5. Due to the speeds and traffic on the freeway, involved officers "slacked-off" the pursuit for safety reasons. The Volkswagen took exit 24, and law enforcement lost visual sight of the car at approximately 7:11 am.

At approximately 7:24 am, the Volkswagen is again picked up by Jackson County Sheriff Deputies southbound on S. Pacific Hwy near D&S Harley Davidson. As the Volkswagen continued through Phoenix, speeds were in excess of 100 mph. The pursuit turned off of S. Pacific Highway at Colver Road going westbound, and eventually made its way back northbound on S. Pacific Highway. It continued westbound on South Stage Road, where a spike stripe was successfully deployed on the Volkswagen. From South Stage Road the pursuit continued until it reached northbound on Columbus Avenue, where due to the speed of the Volkswagen Jackson County Sheriff Sergeant Weaver authorized a PIT maneuver (a method used to cause a car to stall during a pursuit). The initial PIT maneuver was not successful, but a second attempt westbound on Dakota Avenue worked. The pursuit finally ended at 7:38 am, when the Volkswagen driven by Mr. Escobar ended up stalled in a hedge.

As soon as the Volkswagen and the police vehicles came to a stop, Deputy Hegdahl, Sergeant Weaver, and Medford Police Officer Doney exited their vehicles with weapons drawn, giving Mr. Escobar commands to show his hands. All three law enforcement officers had body cameras and Officer Doney had a car camera recording. While giving their commands, Mr. Escobar lowered his driver side window and fired a round from a .38 revolver. Deputy Hegdahl and Officer Doney saw the gun was directly pointed at them when it was fired. Sergeant Weaver believed it was pointed in the direction of both and saw the flash from Mr. Escobar's gun when it was fired. Deputy Hegdahl fired twenty-one rounds, Officer Doney fired eight rounds, and Sergeant Weaver fired two rounds, in response to the threat to their lives and the other law enforcement officers' on scene lives.

Mr. Escobar was struck by several bullets in the shoulder, arm, and head. Law enforcement on scene made sure Mr. Escobar no longer posed a threat, and then began providing aid until Medford Fire and Mercy arrived on scene to take over. He was transported to Rogue Regional Medical Center for treatment of the gunshot wounds, where he was detained that evening on a fugitive complaint out of

Yakima, Washington. Mr. Escobar was detained on August 23, 2021 on charges stemming from the incident in Jackson County on August 11, 2021, and is still hospitalized.

The grand jury was shown body camera footage from all three involved law enforcement officers, along with video from Officer Doney's vehicle. Video from the beginning of the elude on Interstate 5 was also provided for viewing, with a map laying out the entire route of the pursuit.

Conclusion:

Our protocols require that a grand jury make the determination as to whether the officer's use of force was justified under Oregon Law. The grand jury found that the actions of the involved officers in this case were justified and in compliance with Oregon Law. This case was presented to the grand jury by Chief Deputy District Attorney Jeremy Markiewicz and Deputy District Attorney Patrick Green. The grand jury also returned an indictment against Aurelio Escobar for three counts of Attempted Murder in the First Degree with a Firearm, Unlawful Use of a Weapon with a Firearm, Attempt to Elude Police— Felony, Felon in Possession of a Firearm, Unauthorized Use of a Motor Vehicle, Recklessly Endangering Another Person, and Reckless Driving. Mr. Escobar's arraignment on the indictment will be set by the Jackson County Circuit Court.

Since the defendant is charged with crimes, no further evidence or information will be released, pending the resolution of the criminal case.