



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY

AMY L. PADDEN, DISTRICT ATTORNEY
18TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT
SERVING ARAPAHOE COUNTY

January 16, 2026

Todd Chamberlain
Chief of Police
Aurora Police Department
15001 E. Alameda Pkwy
Aurora, CO 80012

**Re: Report of Findings regarding the Officer-Involved Shooting on September 18, 2025,
Aurora Police Department Case AP2025-184358 and 18th JD CIRT # 25-05.**

Dear Chief Chamberlain,

On September 18, 2025, the 18th Judicial District's Critical Incident Response Team ("CIRT") responded to and initiated an investigation of an officer-involved shooting at the Conoco gas station at 290 S. Havana St. in Aurora, Colorado. Aurora Police Officer Derek Paulson discharged his firearm at Blaze Balle-Mason, firing twice at Balle-Mason and striking him with one bullet. Blaze Balle-Mason died the scene of the shooting from a gunshot wound to the upper right chest.

Investigator Katelynn Steitz with the Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office was the lead CIRT investigator. I have completed my review of this incident. Below is my summary of the facts, investigation, legal analysis, and conclusion.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On September 18, 2025, at approximately 7:33pm, a male identifying himself as Blaze Balle-Mason called 911 from inside of a Conoco gas station at 290 S. Havana Street and stated he was armed with a 9mm pistol in the front pocket of his hoodie. Balle-Mason told the 911 dispatcher that he was going to "shoot the place up" and would shoot at the police when they responded to the Conoco. Balle-Mason gave no indication of why he wanted to shoot at law enforcement other than being "tired of the cops" and indicated that his mother was killed by police officers in California (which has not been verified).

Aurora Police Officer Derek Paulson and other officers responded to the Conoco gas station and made contact Balle-Mason by the gas pump area of the Conoco. When Balle-Mason became aware of the officers at the scene, he stood up and approached them with his right hand in his hoodie front pocket. Officer Paulson and the other officers gave verbal commands to Balle-Mason to show his hands and also used a 40mm less lethal device to try to get Balle-Mason's

compliance. When Balle-Mason continued his advancement toward the officers, the officers retreated behind the gas station building, and Officer Paulson transitioned from the 40mm less lethal device to his Glock 45 handgun. Balle-Mason began to run toward the officers with his right hand still in his hoodie pocket, ignoring the officers' commands. As Balle-Mason advanced on the officers, Officer Paulson fired his handgun twice, striking Balle-Mason once. Balle-Mason immediately fell to the ground and died at the scene.

I find that Officer Paulson reasonably believed that Blaze Balle-Mason posed an imminent threat of deadly physical force to himself and the other officers in the area and was justified in using deadly physical force to defend himself and others from an apparent unlawful, imminent and threat of deadly physical force against him and the others.

STATUTORY FRAMEWORK AND PROTOCOLS

C.R.S. § 16-2.5-301 governs investigations into peace officer-involved shootings. This statute provides, in relevant part: "Each police department, sheriff's office, and district attorney within the state shall develop protocols for participating in a multi-agency team, which shall include at least one other police department or sheriff's office, or the Colorado Bureau of Investigation, in conducting any investigation, evaluation, and review of an incident involving the discharge of a firearm by a peace officer that resulted in injury or death. The law enforcement agencies participating need not be from the same judicial district." C.R.S. § 16-2.5-301(1).

The Eighteenth Judicial District CIRT investigates all incidents in which peace officers within the district used, may have used, or is the subject of the use of deadly force or potentially deadly force. CIRT is comprised of highly trained and skilled investigators working under the District Attorney's authority, who are appointed from multiple law enforcement agencies, including my office. To maintain transparency and reduce conflict of interest, officers from the involved agency generally do not perform critical duties related to the CIRT investigation. This multi-jurisdictional team protects the integrity of the investigation by exercising independent judgment in conducting a thorough investigation and presenting their factual findings to the District Attorney's Office to determine whether criminal charges will be filed.

The investigation into this shooting incident was conducted by the 18th Judicial District CIRT. The lead investigator was Katelynn Steitz with the Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office. Other investigators from the Sheriff's Office, the District Attorney's Office, and police departments throughout the jurisdiction also participated.

C.R.S. § 20-1-114 provides, in relevant part: "The district attorney shall, if no criminal charges are filed following the completion of an investigation pursuant to section 16-2.5-301, C.R.S., release a report and publicly disclose the report explaining the district attorney's findings, including the basis for the decision not to charge the officer with any criminal conduct. The district attorney shall post the written report on its website or, if it does not have a website, make it publicly available upon request." C.R.S. § 20-1-114(1).

This document constitutes the report of the findings of the District Attorney for the 18th Judicial District and includes the basis of the decision not to charge the involved officers with any criminal conduct.

MATERIALS REVIEWED AND INFORMATION CONSIDERED

Our office has reviewed the materials provided by the lead investigator and members of the 18th Judicial District CIRT, including body-worn and APD drone camera footage, Conoco surveillance camera footage, reports of investigating officers, and interviews of the involved officer, witness officers, and two citizen witnesses to determine whether there was a crime was committed by the Aurora Police Officer who fired his weapon.

SUMMARY OF THE FACTS

On September 18, 2025, at approximately 7:33pm, Aurora Police Department 911 dispatch received a call from a male identifying himself as Blaze Balle-Mason, DOB 06/29/2008. Balle-Mason told the 911 dispatcher that he was calling from inside the Conoco gas station located at 290 S. Havana Street. Balle-Mason told the dispatcher he was armed with a 9mm pistol and that the pistol was in the front pocket of his hoodie. Balle-Mason described himself as a white male wearing brown pants and Motley Crew sweatshirt. Balle-Mason told the dispatcher he was going to “shoot up the place, and the cops need to come here right away.” The dispatcher asked Balle-Mason to go outside of the gas station, but he refused. Balle-Mason stated he was “just waiting for the cops to show up so I can shoot them.” Balle-Mason gave no indication of why he wanted to shoot at law enforcement other than being “tired of the cops.” Balle-Mason also stated the police had killed his mother in California (although this statement was never verified by law enforcement).

After Balle-Mason hung up on the dispatcher, the Conoco store clerk spoke with Aurora Police Department’s dispatcher and stated that Balle-Mason left the building and the store clerk closed and locked the doors to the store.

Aurora Police Officers responded to the Conoco gas station. While enroute, they were given updates from the Aurora Police Real Time Information Center (RTIC). Those updates came from live drone footage, flown by a staff member from the RTIC, as well as mesh camera footage from a stationary camera located adjacent to the gas station on South Havana Street.

The responding officers were told by the RTIC that Balle-Mason was on the South side of the gas station with his hand in his hoodie pocket. RTIC members said it appeared as if Balle-Mason was concealing something in his hoodie, consistent with his statements to the 911 dispatcher that he had a 9MM pistol in the front pocket of his hoodie

Aurora Police Officers Ferris, Denkin, Esquivel, and Paulson met on the east side of the gas station and discussed a plan of approach. Initially, they were going to approach Balle-Mason from the southeast side of the building, but because their view of Balle-Mason was obscured, they moved to the north side of the building and started to approach Balle-Mason. Officer Ferris was armed with an AR15 patterned rifle, Officer Denkin had his Glock 45 handgun, and Officer Paulson was carrying a 40mm less lethal rifle and also had his Glock 45 handgun holstered. All officers were wearing their department-issued patrol police uniforms.

Officers Paulson, Denkin, and Ferris began to give Balle-Mason verbal commands from the north side of the gas station, while using the building as cover. The officers told Balle-Mason to

remove his hands from his hoodie pocket. Balle-Mason was leaning on the concrete post next to a gas pump on the south side of the gas station. When the officers started commanding him to show them his hands, he stood up and started to approach the officers.

Officer Paulson stepped out from behind the building and gave repeated verbal commands to Balle-Mason. Officer Paulson gave the command “hands, hands, hands.” Balle-Mason had his right hand obscured from view and in his hoodie pocket while he continued to walk toward the officers. To get Balle-Mason to stop and show his hands, Officer Paulson fired his 40mm less lethal rifle four times at Balle-Mason, which was the capacity for the 40mm. From body worn camera footage, it appeared that Officer Paulson hit Balle-Mason all four times and that the 40mm strikes had no effect on him. Balle-Mason continued his advancement toward officers. Officer Paulson retreated behind the gas station building and transitioned to his Glock 45 handgun.

Officers Denkin and Ferris continued to give Balle-Mason verbal commands to “let me see your hands” and “show me your hands,” while Balle-Mason continued to approach them. At that point Balle-Mason began to run toward the officers with his right hand still in his hoodie pocket, still ignoring the officers’ commands. All three officers again retreated behind the gas station building.

As Balle-Mason ran around the corner of the gas station to approximately 10 to 15 feet from the officers, Officer Paulson fired his handgun twice, striking Balle-Mason one time. Balle-Mason immediately fell to the ground. Balle-Mason’s hands were pulled up to his chest, concealed beneath his body and he was lying face down on the ground.

Additional Aurora police officers arrived that the scene and rendered aid to Balle-Mason, while the involved officers were transported to Aurora Police Department headquarters. Balle-Mason died at the scene of the shooting.

On September 19, 2025, Dr. Casey Bitting of the Arapahoe County Coroner’s Office completed an autopsy of Balle-Mason and determined that Balle-Mason was hit with all four less lethal rounds fired by Officer Paulson. There were large prominent bruises on his body (right inner forearm, left rib cage, right upper arm, right outer forearm) consistent with having been hit by the less lethal rounds.

Dr. Bitting ruled that Balle-Mason died from a gunshot wound to his upper right chest.

AUDIO OF 911 CALL FROM BLAZE BALLE-MASON

Thursday, September 18, 2025, 19:33:01: a 911 call to Aurora Dispatch by Blaze Balle-Mason

Contents transcribed at the direction of a CIRT investigator as close to verbatim as possible

Aurora Dispatcher	911, what's the address of the emergency?
Blaze Balle-Mason	290 South Havana Street, Aurora, Colorado.

Aurora Dispatcher	Thank you. Is that a house, apartment, or business?
Blaze	Uh, it's a business. A 7-11, I think.
Aurora Dispatcher	Okay. Thank you. And, um, what's your full number in case we get disconnected?
Blaze	Uh, I have no idea. I'm sorry. I'm using a payphone.
Aurora Dispatcher	Okay. No, you're okay. What's your name?
Blaze	Uh BLAZE BALLE-MASON.
Aurora Dispatcher	Thank you and tell me exactly what happened.
Blaze	Uh, I'm actually in here with a 9-millimeter pistol. I'm about to shoot the place up and, uh, I think the cops need to come here right away.
Aurora Dispatcher	Okay, sir can I, I have you exit the, uh, building?
Blaze	Uh, no I'm gonna stay in here. That's...
Aurora Dispatcher	Okay, i--, is there a reason why want to do this?
Blaze	Honestly, I'm waiting for the cops to show up so I can just shoot at 'em.
Aurora Dispatcher	Was, was there anything that led you to this place today? Anything going on?
Blaze	No, not really. I'm just, uh, tired of cops.
Aurora Dispatcher	Okay. wha--, what's your date of birth?
Blaze	06/29/08.
Aurora Dispatcher	06/29/08. Okay. Thank you. Did you come in a, in a car or did you come on foot?
Blaze	Uh, no I walked.
Aurora Dispatcher	You walked. Okay. Thank you. And then, um, can I just get just get a description of you for the officers?
Blaze	Yeah, I got some, uh, red socks on, brown pants, and a Motley Crew sweatshirt.

Aurora Dispatcher	Okay. What race are you?
Blaze	White.
Aurora Dispatcher	Thank you. And you said you were born in 2008?
Blaze	Yes, that's correct.
Aurora Dispatcher	Okay. Wh--, where is the gun right now?
Blaze	Uh, in my left pocket.
Aurora Dispatcher	Your left pocket.
Blaze	Inside my sweatshirt.
Aurora Dispatcher	Inside your sweatshirt. Okay. Thank you. Ha--, a, have you approached anybody in the store at all?
Blaze	Uh, just asked for the address and a phone. That's about it.
Aurora Dispatcher	You did? Okay. Does anybody know that you went there with those intentions today?
Blaze	No.
Aurora Dispatcher	Okay.
Blaze	I haven't talked to nobody. (In the background) uh, no.
Aurora Dispatcher	Okay. Eh, and I'm sorry wh--, what kind of gun did you have again? Was that a 45 you said?
Blaze	A 9-millimeter.
Aurora Dispatcher	A 9-millimeter. Okay. Is the gun loaded?
Blaze	Yes.
Aurora Dispatcher	It is. Okay. Were any shots fired?
Blaze	No, not yet.

Aurora Dispatcher	Okay.
Blaze	(Talking in the background)
Aurora Dispatcher	Does anyone need any medical attention right now?
Blaze	No.
Aurora Dispatcher	No. Okay. Okay. Uh, I'm gonna stay on the line with you until they get there. I, I really don't want you to do anything to hurt anybody else. Is there, I, I know you said earlier that there's nothing that led you to this. Um, eh, wa--, was there just, was it just a decision decided to make?
Blaze	Yeah, I'm just tired of the cops miss.
Aurora Dispatcher	Okay. Did you have like a experience with officers at, that made this happen?
Blaze	My mom was killed.
Aurora Dispatcher	Your mom. Ok--. I'm very sorry to hear that. Wh--, what's your mom's name?
Blaze	STORMY BALLE-MASON.
Aurora Dispatcher	Okay. Was this recent?
Blaze	Five or six years ago.
Aurora Dispatcher	Okay, and you said STORMY is her first name?
Blaze	Yes, ma'am.
Aurora Dispatcher	Okay. I--, I'm very sorry to hear that. Did that happen here in Aurora?
Blaze	Uh, no. California.
Aurora Dispatcher	California. Okay. Are, are you from Aurora?
Blaze	No, California.
Aurora Dispatcher	Okay. How long have you been in Aurora for?
Blaze	Five or six months.

Aurora Dispatcher	Five. Okay. Did you move out here by yourself?
Blaze	Yes, ma'am.
Aurora Dispatcher	You did? Okay. Do you have any like, sorta like roommates? Or anybody like that?
Blaze	No, ma'am.
Aurora Dispatcher	No. Okay. Do you mind me asking where you live or what your address is?
Blaze	I, I'm, um, at a treatment facility currently. I ran.
Aurora Dispatcher	You did? Okay. Was that treatment facility in Aurora?
Blaze	Yes, ma'am. Third Way.
Aurora Dispatcher	Third Way. Okay. Thank you. Were you going to school at all?
Blaze	No, ma'am.
Aurora Dispatcher	No. Okay. were you going to school in, um, in, back in California? Before you came out here.
Blaze	I haven't been in school in a while miss.
Aurora Dispatcher	You haven't? Okay. Thank you. And then, um, eh, I just wanna just, um, check in with you. Where's the gun right now? Is it still in your pocket?
Blaze	Yes, ma'am.
Aurora Dispatcher	Okay. Thank you. And I, I just want you to stay on the line with me, okay? I, I don't want you to do anything. I--, if you feel like you're getting ready to do anything or if start, don't, like the questions I have are moving too far you just let me know, okay?
Blaze	Yes, ma'am.
Aurora Dispatcher	Okay. When, when did you leave the facility?
	End of phone call

INTERVIEW OF AURORA POLICE OFFICER DOMINIC FERRIS (WITNESS INTERVIEW)

Officer Dominic Ferris has been a police officer with Aurora Police Department for over two years. Officer Ferris is assigned to patrol, working the District One swing shift. When this incident occurred, he was working with Officer Esquivel. Both Officers Ferris and Esquivel were wearing full police uniforms and driving in a marked Aurora Police Department Chevy Tahoe.

Officers Ferris and Esquivel self-assigned to this call for service after hearing dispatch air the call details. They drove to the Conoco gas station and while enroute received a description of the male wearing a dark colored hoodie and stating that he had a firearm in the hoodie. While stopped at a red light and the intersection of E. Alameda Avenue and S. Havana Street, Officer Ferris saw Balle-Mason at the gas pumps with his hand in his hoodie pocket, which he believed was consistent with a person concealing something or holding a firearm. Officer Ferris notified that Balle-Mason's body language changed when he apparently saw the patrol vehicle at the traffic light next to the gas station. Balle-Mason, who was leaning against a post, straightened up and changed his posture, and Balle-Mason's gaze appeared to be fixed on the patrol vehicle.

After arriving at the Conoco station, Officer Ferris selected his AR15 patterned rifle because he believed they would be making contact with Balle-Mason from a safe distance given that Balle-Mason told the dispatcher that he was armed.

Officers Ferris and Esquivel met with Officers Denkin and Paulson on the east side of the gas station. They decided to approach Balle-Mason from the northwest instead of the east side because they had a clearer view of Balle-Mason on the northwest side. Officer Esquivel stayed on the east side of the building. Officers Ferris and Denkin went with Officer Paulson to contact Balle-Mason on the northwest side of the building.

When the officers set up on the northwest side of the building there were two males walking near Balle-Mason. When Officer Ferris called out to the males to have them move away, Balle-Mason got up and walked into Officer Ferris' line of sight. Balle-Mason still had his hand concealed in his front hoodie pocket. Officer Ferris began giving verbal commands to "Show me your hands", which were ignored by Balle-Mason as he continued to walk toward officers. Officer Ferris saw Officer Paulson deploy the 40mm less lethal device towards Balle-Mason and noted that, although the 40mm rounds hit Balle-Mason, they were ineffective and Balle-Mason started to advance at the officers quicker after he was hit by the less lethal rounds. Officer Ferris and the other officers again moved back behind the gas station building to attempt to distance themselves from Balle-Mason. Officer Ferris described Balle-Mason making a wide, fast turn around the corner of the building. Balle-Mason's stance was bladed toward Officer Ferris and there were two males wearing white in the background behind Balle-Mason. Balle-Mason was now running at the officers.

Officer Ferris decided not to shoot because of the two men walking behind Balle-Mason. Officer Ferris heard two gunshots from his right side and saw Balle-Mason running toward the officers with his hands still in his hoodie. Officer Ferris believed Balle-Mason was attempting to get

closer to the officers in order to shoot them with more accuracy. Officer Ferris estimated Balle-Mason was within 15 feet of the officers when he was shot. Based on the movements Balle-Mason was making and how quickly he was running toward officers, Officer Ferris believed Balle-Mason heard the verbal commands to show his hands and was actively ignoring those commands. Officer Ferris saw Balle-Mason fall to the ground after being shot; his hands were still concealed under his body.

Officer Ferris saw the incoming officers render aid to Balle-Mason and assisted them until he was escorted from the scene and transported to Aurora Police Headquarters.

INTERVIEW OF AURORA POLICE OFFICER JONATHAN DENKIN (WITNESS INTERVIEW)

Officer John Denkin has been a police officer with the Aurora Police Department for approximately 10 years. Officer Denkin was working his assigned District 1 swing shift on September 18, 2025. Officer Denkin was dispatched to this call for service at the Conoco gas station. Officer Denkin was aware of a reporting party who called 911 saying he was using the gas station's phone and wanted to shoot up the store and shoot the police, claiming police had killed his mother in California. The male stated he had a 9mm in his pocket and was described as wearing brown pants, red socks, and a Motley Crew hoodie or sweatshirt.

Officer Denkin initially parked at an RTD station north of the gas station to wait for backup and develop a plan to approach the gas station. Officers Paulson and Ferris arrived as backup, with Officer Paulson carrying less lethal 40mm rifle and Ferris carrying an AR15 rifle, while Officer Denkin had his pistol. The officers approached from the northwest corner of the gas station building after confirming with the store clerk that the person who had made the call was still near the south side door.

When the officers contacted Balle-Mason, Officer Denkin observed Balle-Mason in a "bladed stance" with one hand in his hoodie pocket. Upon seeing the officers, Balle-Mason's demeanor immediately changed, and he began running directly at them. Officer Paulson fired three to four 40mm less lethal rounds that appeared to hit with Balle-Mason, but they had no effect. Balle-Mason showed no physical reaction to being hit with the 40mm less lethal rounds and continued charging at the officers.

Officer Denkin believed Balle-Mason knew they were police because he had been calmly talking to a male and female at the gas pumps but immediately changed his behavior and began approaching when he saw the uniformed officers. Officers Denkin, Paulson and Ferris tactically moved back to the north side of the gas station. When Balle-Mason rounded the corner, charging at the officers with his hand in his pocket, Officer Paulson discharged his firearm at Balle-Mason.

Throughout the encounter, Officer Denkin feared for his life and the lives of his fellow officers, believing Balle-Mason intended to shoot them based on his statements to dispatch about wanting to kill police and having a gun, combined with his aggressive charging behavior and lack of response to less lethal force. Officer Denkin immediately called for rescue assistance after the shooting.

CIVILIAN WITNESS INTERVIEW – CONOCO GAS STATION CUSTOMER

Conoco customer Edwin M.-M. went to the gas station to get a propane tank refilled. Edwin M.-M. was waiting near the propane tank cage for the store attendant. Because the attendant never met him, he attempted to go into the gas station to get the attendant. When he did so, the attendant told him to leave and the doors to the business were locked. Edwin M.-M. noticed a young man later identified as Blaze Balle-Mason wearing a dark sweatshirt with his right hand underneath the sweatshirt near gas pump #2. Edwin M.-M. told the CIRT investigators that he knew something was wrong when the doors to the gas station were locked, so he returned to his vehicle, which was parked by the car wash to the east of the gas station. Edwin M.-M. heard sirens and saw Balle-Mason running toward the sirens. Edwin M.-M. lost sight of Balle-Mason when he ran around the other side of the gas station. Edwin M.-M. heard number of gun shots, but he couldn't recall how many shots he heard. Edwin M.-M. did not witness the shooting. Edwin M.-M. attempted to leave the area but was contacted by law enforcement and voluntarily gave a statement to the investigators.

CIVILIAN WITNESS INTERVIEW – CONOCO STORE CLERK

Conoco store clerk R.H. was working the 2pm to 10pm shift on September 18, 2025. He was the only employee working at the time of the incident. R.H. said he observed a young man later identified as Blaze Balle-Mason come into the store in the north door between 7:30pm and 8:00pm. He did not see Balle-Mason associated with any vehicle and assumed he had come to the store on foot but was unsure of which direction he came from. R.H. said Balle-Mason was alone and he did not see Balle-Mason interact with any other customers. R.H. said there were two or three other customers in the store at the time Balle-Mason entered.

After entering the store, R.H. said Balle-Mason walked around the entire store and then up and down each aisle. R.H. said Balle-Mason's behavior was suspicious to him because Balle-Mason did not appear to be shopping and did not select any items for purchase. R.H. said he also watched Balle-Mason's movement through the store on the camera monitor. After walking around the interior of the store, R.H. said Balle-Mason approached him at the counter and asked him what the address of the store was. R.H. described Balle-Mason as having a "scared, like hesitant voice" when he asked for the address. R.H. said he told Balle-Mason what the address was. After a brief pause, Balle-Mason asked R.H. a second time what the address was. This time R.H. said Balle-Mason sounded "nervous and kind of angry." R.H. said he wrote down the address to the store on a piece of paper and gave it to Balle-Mason. R.H. said he thought to himself at the time that maybe Balle-Mason was trying to get someone to come pick him up.

R.H. said that a short time later, Balle-Mason again approached him at the counter and asked if he could use the phone. R.H. said he gave Balle-Mason the store phone to use which was a cordless phone. R.H. said Balle-Mason took the phone and walked to the far end of the store by the cooler to make his call. This was odd to R.H. because when he had allowed others to use the phone in the past, he said they would stand by the counter and make their call before giving the phone back. He thought it was strange that Balle-Mason walked so far away to make his call. R.H. said Balle-Mason was on the phone for approximately 5 minutes before returning it to him.

R.H. explained that the entire time Balle-Mason was walking around in the store he had one hand concealed in his jacket pocket. He believed it was Balle-Mason's left hand. Because of this, along with the suspicious behavior displayed by Balle-Mason, R.H. said he thought Balle-Mason may have been armed with a weapon. When Balle-Mason returned the phone to R.H. at the counter, R.H. said Balle-Mason started to pull his concealed hand out of his jacket pocket at the same time as he handed R.H. the phone with his other hand. In that moment R.H. said he thought "my life might be in danger." R.H. said he flinched in anticipation of that perceived danger. He described the flinch as a downward and away motion of his entire upper body.

About 30 seconds after Balle-Mason returned the phone to him, R.H. said he received a phone call from police dispatch who instructed him to lock the doors to the store and not to go outside. R.H. said he complied with the instructions and locked the store. He said there were no customers inside the store when he secured it. As he locked the doors on the north side of the store R.H. said he observed Balle-Mason sitting on the ground outside near the doors. R.H. said two customers approached the door and he waved them away. He said Balle-Mason did not engage with the customers and that Balle-Mason appeared to be "debating on what he wanted to do."

R.H. said within about two to three minutes after dispatch called him, the first police officer arrived on scene and contacted him at the south doors of the store. R.H. said the police officer was in full uniform and clearly recognizable as a police officer. He did not see any patrol cars or flashing emergency lights at that time. R.H. said the officer told him to remain locked inside the store. After speaking with the officer, R.H. looked outside the north side of the store and observed Balle-Mason stand up and walk over to the pump island and sit down near pump number 1.

R.H. said about one minute after Balle-Mason moved to the pump island, he observed officers walking from the south side of the store around toward the north side of the store. R.H. said he then looked out to the north side of the store and observed Balle-Mason react to the approaching officers. R.H. described Balle-Mason's reaction as "startled." R.H. said Balle-Mason immediately stood up and walked toward the officers. R.H. explained that the officers were out of his view behind the windowless wall on the east side of the store at the time, but he knew Balle-Mason was walking toward their direction. R.H. said he could not hear anything the officers were saying to Balle-Mason and did not hear Balle-Mason saying anything to the officers. R.H. said he observed that Balle-Mason still had the same hand concealed inside his jacket pocket as he walked toward the officers. R.H. said Balle-Mason walked toward the officers at a "normal" pace and soon walked out of his view near the northeast corner of the store. At that time R.H. could not see Balle-Mason nor the officers. R.H. said "less than two minutes" later he heard two gunshots.

After hearing the gunshots, R.H. said he moved to a different position in the store where he was able to see Balle-Mason who was lying on the ground with officers surrounding him.

INTERVIEW OF AURORA POLICE OFFICER DEREK PAULSON (INVOLVED OFFICER)

Officer Derek Paulson has been a police officer with Aurora Police Department for over two years. He is assigned to patrol, working District One; swing shift. Officer Paulson was working his assigned patrol shift on September 18, 2025, when this incident occurred.

Officer Paulson was wearing his department issued, fully adorned police uniform and driving a fully marked patrol vehicle. Officer Paulson drove to the location with lights and sirens on but turned them off prior to arrival.

Officer Paulson was dispatched to the call via self-assignment. Prior to arrival at the Conoco gas station, Officer Paulson learned from the dispatcher that a 17-year-old white male, wearing brown pants was armed with a handgun and he was going to start shooting people and police officers. Officer Paulson also learned that the store clerk also called into 911 stating Balle-Mason was at the store and that the clerk had locked all the doors to be safe and that Balle-Mason was then on the south side of the gas station.

As Officer Paulson arrived at the Conoco gas station, he was given information from the RTIC that Balle-Mason was on the southwest corner of the gas station. Officer Paulson parked East of the Conoco gas station and approached on foot. A RTIC team member advised that Balle-Mason was standing with his right hand under his sweatshirt appearing to be concealing something in his sweatshirt. The RTIC team member was unable to see exactly what Balle-Mason had, but believed he was hiding something.

Officer Paulson met Officers Denkin, Ferris, and Esquivel, and they determined they would approach Balle-Mason, give verbal commands and contact him. Initially, Officer Denkin wanted to approach from the east, but Officer Paulson suggested a different approach that would allow him to utilize the 40mm less lethal rifle if needed.

As Officers Paulson, Denkin, and Ferris approached the northwest corner of the store, there were two young males walking through the parking lot near Balle-Mason. The officers requested the two males to move along, at which time Balle-Mason appeared to notice the officers on the scene. Balle-Mason then got up from the cement barrier next to the gas pump with his hand inside his front hoodie pocket and began to approach the officers.



(Still frame photo of Balle-Mason from Conoco footage as he was initially contacted by law enforcement.)

As Balle-Mason approached, Officer Paulson stepped out from behind the gas station building and began giving verbal commands for Balle-Mason to show his hands. When Balle-Mason ignored his commands and the commands of the other officers, Officer Paulson fired four 40mm less lethal rounds at Balle-Mason. Officer Paulson struck Balle-Mason multiple times with the 40mm rounds in the mid section, but Balle-Mason continued to approach him with his hand still concealed under his hoodie. Officer Paulson noted that the normal response from a person hit with a 40mm projectile is incapacitation. When Officer Paulson saw that the 40mm rounds had no effect on Balle-Mason, he switched to lethal force since the less lethal force did not work. Officer Paulson believed the lack of incapacitation appeared to increase Balle-Mason's motivation to advance towards the officers in order to hurt them.



(Still photo of Balle-Mason from drone footage as he was addressed by law enforcement and began approaching them. His hand appears to be hidden in the front pocket of his hoodie.)

After the 40mm rounds did not work to gain Balle-Mason's compliance, Officer Paulson retreated behind the gas station building. As Balle-Mason continued to advance toward the officers he decided to transition to his handgun. Officer Paulson saw Balle-Mason take a wide approach around the corner of the gas station. Officer Paulson believed a normal person would turn the corner in a tight turn using the sidewalk. This raised Officer Paulson's fear that Balle-Mason was armed and going to use a firearm against officers.



(Still photo from Officer Paulson's Body Worn Camera of Balle-Mason running at officers as they retreated behind the building.)

When Officer Paulson noticed Balle-Mason had increased his speed and began running directly at the officers as he came around the corner, while still appearing to be concealing something with his right hand under his hoodie, Officer Paulson fired one round at Balle-Mason.



(Still photo from Officer Paulson's BWC as Balle-Mason as Officer Paulson fired his first shot.)

When Balle-Mason continued running toward officers still with his hand concealed under his hoodie, Officer Paulson fired a second round at Balle-Mason, at which point Balle-Mason fell to the ground, with his hands underneath him.



(Still photo from Officer Paulson's BWC of Balle-Mason as Officer Paulson fired a second shot.)

Officer Paulson stopped shooting when he believed that Balle-Mason was in a position that he was no longer an active threat to the officers. Officer Paulson continued to point his handgun at Balle-Mason until the officers were able to safely remove Balle-Mason's hands from underneath his body.



(Still photo from Officer Paulson's BWC of Balle-Mason immediately after being shot.)

Given Balle-Mason's apparent motivation, advancements, increase in speed and the lack of distance between him and the officers, Officer Paulson told CIRT investigators that he did not feel there was any other option than to escalate his use of force from verbal commands and the 40mm less lethal rifle to the use of his handgun. Officer Paulson believed he or other officers were going to be shot by Balle-Mason if he did not shoot Balle-Mason. Officer Paulson told investigators that he knows it is possible to shoot a firearm from a place of concealment under clothing; the firearm does not have to be out from underneath clothing in order to shoot.

Incoming officers rendered aid to Balle-Mason. Officer Paulson was transported to Aurora Police Headquarters by a fellow officer, where he turned in his body worn camera and firearm.

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Pursuant to CIRT protocols, members of the CIRT inspected Officer Paulson's Aurora Police Department issued Glock 45 (9mm) handgun. The standard Glock 45 magazine fits 17 rounds of ammunition. Officer Paulson stated he fills his magazine with 17 rounds and puts one additional round of ammunition directly into the chamber. Therefore, a fully loaded firearm with one round in the chamber and a fully loaded magazine totals 18 rounds.

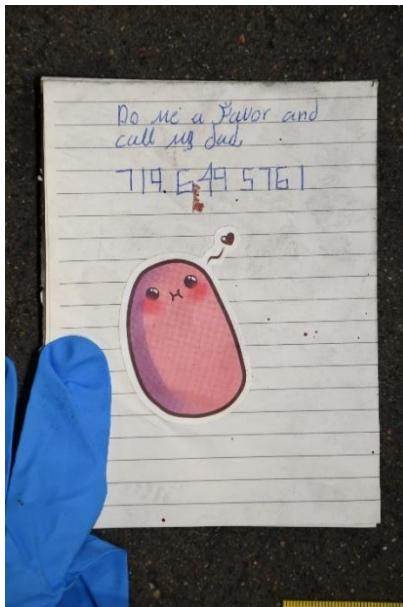
When members of the CIRT inspected Officer Paulson's handgun, they noted that his 17-round capacity magazine had 16 rounds remaining, indicating he fired two rounds from his firearm—one from the chamber and the other from the magazine. This was consistent with Officer Paulson's recollection that he fired his handgun twice at Balle-Mason.

Members of the CIRT also conducted a thorough search of the scene of the incident, locating all four 40mm less lethal rounds and two spent ammunition shells at the scene. CIRT investigators also found Belle-Mason's glasses and two handwritten notes on the ground near where he was shot and fell to the ground.



(A closer picture of where Balle-Mason was laying and where Balle-Mason's glasses and a handwritten note were located.)

One of the handwritten notes found near where Balle-Mason fell to the ground after being shot said "Do me a favor and call my dad. 719-649-5761." The number was later confirmed as Balle-Mason's father's phone number.



(Photo of the note stating "Do me a favor and call my dad. 719-649-5761.)

APPLICABLE LAW

All prosecutors have an ethical obligation to file criminal charges only if the prosecutor reasonably believes that the charges are supported by probable cause, that admissible evidence will be sufficient to support conviction beyond a reasonable doubt, and that the decision to charge is in the interests of justice. After criminal charges are filed, a prosecutor may maintain the charges only if the prosecutor continues to reasonably believe that probable cause exists and that admissible evidence will be sufficient to prove all elements of the crime beyond a reasonable doubt. Additionally, the prosecution must be able to disprove any statutorily recognized justification or defense, such as self-defense or defense of others, beyond a reasonable doubt.

The District Attorney's review of an officer-involved shooting event is guided by the statutes pertaining to the affirmative defenses applicable to use of force by peace officers, specifically C.R.S. § 18-1-707:

(1) Peace officers, in carrying out their duties, shall apply nonviolent means, when possible, before resorting to the use of physical force. A peace officer may use physical force only if nonviolent means would be ineffective in effecting an arrest, preventing an escape, or preventing an imminent threat of serious bodily injury or death to the peace officer or another person.

...

(2) When physical force is used, a peace officer shall:

- (a) Not use deadly physical force to apprehend a person who is suspected of only a minor or nonviolent offense;
- (b) Use only a degree of force consistent with the minimization of injury to others;

(c) Ensure that assistance and medical aid are rendered to any injured or affected persons as soon as practicable; and

(d) Ensure that any identified relatives or next of kin of persons who have sustained serious bodily injury or death are notified as soon as practicable.

...

(3) A peace officer is justified in using deadly physical force to make an arrest only when all other means of apprehension are unreasonable given the circumstances and

(a) The arrest is for a felony involving conduct including the use or threatened use of deadly physical force;

(b) The suspect poses an immediate threat of death or serious bodily injury to the peace officer or another person;

(c) The force employed does not create a substantial risk of injury to other persons.

(4) A peace officer shall identify himself or herself as a peace officer and give a clear verbal warning of his or her intent to use firearms or other deadly physical force, with sufficient time for the warning to be observed, unless to do so would unduly place peace officers at risk of injury or would create a risk of death or injury to other persons.

(4.5) Notwithstanding any other provision in this section, a peace officer is justified in using deadly force if the peace officer has an objectively reasonable belief that a lesser degree of force is inadequate and the peace officer has objectively reasonable grounds to believe, and does believe, that he or another person is in imminent danger of being killed or of receiving serious bodily injury.

...

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

The question presented to the District Attorney's Office is whether Officer Derek Paulson reasonably believed his use of deadly physical force was necessary to defend himself and others from what he believed to be the imminent use of deadly physical force by Blaze Balle-Mason.

The actions of Officer Derek Paulson were reasonably justified. At the moment that Officer Paulson fired his handgun at Balle-Mason, he reasonably believed that Balle-Mason was imminently attempting to use deadly physical force by charging Officer Paulson and the other officers and that he was concealing a firearm in the front pocket of his hoodie. Officer Paulson and the other officers were aware that prior to their contact with Balle-Mason, he told a 911 dispatcher that (1) he had a 9mm pistol in the front pocket of his hoodie, (2) he was going to use that pistol to shoot up the Conoco station, and (3) he was going to wait for the police to show up so that he could shoot at them. When Officer Paulson and the other officers first contacted Balle-Mason, he had his hand in his front hoodie pocket. Despite repeated efforts by the officers to Balle-Mason to remove his hands from the front pocket of his hoodie and later deploying a less lethal 40mm device to try to gain Balle-Mason's compliance, Balle-Mason continued to

advance towards the officers with his hands in his hoodie pocket. When none of their verbal or less lethal efforts to deescalate the situation or gain Balle-Mason's compliance worked, and after Balle-Mason charged at the officers with his hand still in the front pocket of his hoodie, Officer Paulson discharged his firearm to save his own and the other's lives from what he reasonably believed to be imminent threat to the officers.

Officer Paulson and the other officers believed that Balle-Mason was armed with a pistol and that he intended to shoot at them. When Balle-Mason charged at them, there was no further opportunity for the officers to use a lesser amount of force to neutralize the threat to themselves or the public other than firing at him.

I find that Officer Paulson reasonably believed that Blaze Balle-Mason posed an imminent threat of deadly physical force to Officer Paulson, his fellow officers, and others in the area.

Accordingly, I find that Officer Paulson did not commit any crimes. Our office will not file criminal charges against him.

Sincerely,



Amy Padden

District Attorney

cc: Arapahoe County Sheriff Tyler Brown
Katelynn Steitz, Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office
Ryan Brackley, Assistant District Attorney, 18th Judicial District