



**COUNTY OF AUGUSTA
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My office is in receipt of a report dated July 1, 2021 from the Virginia State Police Bureau of Criminal Investigation regarding the May 14th death of Jeffrey Bruce in Augusta County, Virginia. The evidence contained in the report indicates the deputies involved acted appropriately. What follows is a summary of the investigative findings in this case and the ultimate conclusion reached by my office.

In the twenty-four hours preceding his death, Mr. Bruce had been quite vocal about the fact that he was not going back to jail. He previously spent eighteen years incarcerated after pleading guilty to a series of indictments resulting from his repeated rape of a five-year-old little girl who was a blood relative. He also photographed this abuse, and was thus found guilty of taking obscene photographs of this minor child during these rapes. The precise relationship is omitted here so as not to reveal the identity of that victim. He was explicit about the fact that he would not return to jail.

On May 14, 2021, an Augusta County Deputy was dispatched to a breaking and entering at 35 Blue Fish Lane. When he arrived, he surveyed the damage from the burglary. He spoke to the owner of the property who informed him that the suspect lives with his mother in a trailer across the shared driveway. The deputy went to the trailer and spoke to Mr. Bruce's mother, Barbara Bruce. She informed the deputy that Jeffrey had no intention of going peacefully. She also indicated Jeffrey had knives and had been using methamphetamine. This deputy then saw Mr. Bruce and Mr. Bruce's sister outside. He approached Mr. Bruce's sister. She confirmed to the deputy that Mr. Bruce was the person who broke into and severely damaged the home at 35 Bluefish Lane. She also indicated Mr. Bruce was known to carry knives and that he had expressed a desire to die at the hands of a police officer.

The deputy called for backup units. Once one arrived, the first deputy on scene briefed the arriving deputy about what he had learned to that point in the investigation. While they were talking, the deputies heard rustling in the distance near some woods. They saw Mr. Bruce near the tree line and loudly commanded him to stop. He did not comply, and the officers walked in his direction. They followed him a long distance into the woods, eventually losing sight of him.

Eventually, they saw a depression in some very tall grass and realized that Mr. Bruce was lying facedown there with his hands concealed. The deputies drew their service weapons and loudly ordered Mr. Bruce to stay down. Bruce stood up, at that time revealing a knife, which he held like an icepick above his head.

He screamed and charged at the deputies. They backed up to create space and loudly commanded him to stop. Mr. Bruce continued to advance, causing the deputy to discharge his weapon four times. Each shot struck Mr. Bruce in the torso. Mr. Bruce fell to the ground. The deputies removed the nine-inch hunting knife from his hand and tossed it approximately five feet away. The deputy who fired wrote "I was in fear for my life the most scared I have ever been in 16 years of doing this line of work. I held Jeffrey's hand until rescue arrived and he passed away."

Subsequent to the shooting, the Virginia State Police conducted interviews with several witnesses. Barbara Bruce indicated that May 14th was the first time she has been afraid her son would physically attack her. She indicated that on that day he was "hateful" and that he "looked at her with a wildness in his eyes." She further told investigators on that day that Jeffrey was "wild, like a caged animal," that the man she was looking at that day was not her son, "it was the devil." Ms. Bruce further stated Jeffrey had an "evil devil look in his eyes." Investigators subsequently interviewed Angela Bruce, Jeffrey's sister. She indicated Mr. Bruce had stated repeatedly that he would not return to jail, that on that day he had "nothing in his eyes" and that "it was like looking at the devil."

A person may use deadly force in self-defense when he reasonably feels he is in imminent danger of serious bodily harm or death. The relevant facts of the matter are not in legitimate dispute. Therefore, the question presented is simple: Did the deputy reasonably feel he was in danger? The answer is yes. He indicated he was in fear for his life, that he had never been that scared in sixteen years of law enforcement. Clearly his fear was entirely reasonable, as a man with a deadly weapon raised above his head was running toward him and screaming. The deputy's actions in this matter were entirely appropriate.



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Commonwealth's Attorney