

February 7, 2025

Special Prosecutor Determination:

Thermopolis Officer Involved Shooting Death of Jared Gottula on September 9, 2024

The Wyoming Department of Criminal Investigation (WDCI) began its investigation into the officer involved shooting death of Jared Gottula age 41 on the afternoon of September 9, 2024. The investigation is thorough and complete. After review of the investigation the Special Prosecutor has determined that no criminal charges will be filed related to the incident.

On September 9, 2024 Jared Gottula was unemployed and suffering from diagnosed but untreated mental illness. Mr. Gottula was wandering outdoors and behaving in a manner that caused a neighbor with a young child to become concerned for her family's safety. The neighbor was also concerned for Mr. Gottula's father who is an elderly gentlemen residing in the home with Mr. Gottula. The neighbor observed Mr. Gottula walking and "thrashing" a metal baseball around. The neighbor contacted law enforcement and advised of the situation she was observing.

A Thermopolis Police Department (TPD) Officer arrived on scene and observed Mr. Gottula while Mr. Gottula walked between two houses holding a metal baseball bat. Mr. Gottula did not notice the Officer at this time. The Officer positioned his patrol vehicle in a manner he hoped would allow him to safely assess the situation. The TPD Officer used his loud speaker and requested that Mr. Gottula put down the baseball bat. Mr. Gottula became enraged at the Officer's request and began charging toward the Officer's vehicle raised bat in hand.

Reacting to the emergent situation, the Officer bumped Mr. Gottula with his patrol vehicle hoping to dislodge the bat from his grasp. The bumping was ineffective. Mr. Gottula retained the bat and continued his assault. Mr. Gottula maneuvered himself towards the driver's side door of the Officer's patrol vehicle. The Officer powered his vehicle into reverse in an effort to gain separation. As the Officer reversed his vehicle, Mr. Gottula was able to open the Officer's door. The Officer continued in reverse while Mr. Gottula chased after the Officer. Mr. Gottula opened the Officer's door yet again, this time as the Officer powered his vehicle in a forward direction. Mr. Gottula chased the Officer up the street. *(It was at this time that the Hot Springs County Sheriff (HSC) Deputy arrived on scene and became involved for the remainder of the interaction with Mr. Gottula.)*

The Officer gained separation from Mr. Gottula and turned his vehicle around. The Officer struck Mr. Gottula with his vehicle again. This caused a loud noise however it is unclear if the noise was caused by Mr. Gottula's bat striking the Officer's vehicle. Mr. Gottula was knocked to the ground. Mr. Gottula still did not drop the bat. Mr. Gottula regained his feet and continued to move towards and threaten the Officer, bat in hand. The Officer reversed his vehicle into an adjacent vacant lot. The Officer put his vehicle into forward and attempted to strike Mr. Gottula again. It is unclear if the Officer was able to strike Mr. Gottula at this time. Mr. Gottula remained armed with the bat. The Officer continued in a loop through the vacant lot turning his vehicle around. The Officer then struck Mr. Gottula again knocking him to the ground. Mr. Gottula again returned to his feet, bat still in hand.

Mr. Gottula walked up a nearby railroad berm and engaged from a short distance in conversation with the HSC Deputy who had recently arrived. Mr. Gottula asked why law enforcement

was there. The HSC Deputy advised that it was because Mr. Gottula was being a threat. Mr. Gottula still refused to drop the bat.

*It is important to note that throughout the entire encounter, law enforcement and citizen witnesses hollered on numerous occasions pleading with Mr. Gottula to drop the bat.*

Mr. Gottula began walking down the berm, bat still in hand. He walked towards the TPD patrol vehicle while holding the bat and resting the bat on his shoulder. From the manner in which Mr. Gottula was holding the bat coupled with his stride indicated that Mr. Gottula was attempting to intimidate the Deputy. Mr. Gottula arrived at the TPD vehicle and looked inside the passenger window. Mr. Gottula is heard saying something to the effect that he has guns also, in response to a citizen hollering that he could get shot. Simultaneously, the TPD Officer exited the patrol vehicle and walked towards the rear of the vehicle. The Deputy remained towards the front of the patrol vehicle on the passenger side with an unobstructed view of Mr. Gottula.

The TPD Officer drew his Taser and walked around the back of his vehicle. The TPD Officer intended to target Mr. Gottula with the Taser. Mr. Gottula became aware of the Officer's presence. Mr. Gottula raised the bat in a pose to strike and simultaneously leap stepped toward the Officer seemingly with the intent to hit the Officer with the bat. The TPD Officer dodged out of the way. The TPD Officer was able to discharge his Taser either immediately before, during or immediately after Mr. Gottula's attempted strike.

Mr. Gottula appeared unfazed by the Taser. Mr. Gottula then made a sound that may be described as a guttural battle scream, unclear if driven by bravado or irrationality but nevertheless terrifying. Mr. Gottula then turned his attention toward the HSC Deputy and began walking towards the Deputy as the Deputy briefly retreated. Mr. Gottula raised the bat in his right hand and the Deputy began firing his service weapon at Mr. Gottula.

The HSC Deputy's action in firing his weapon was reasonable. A metal baseball bat is a weapon capable of causing death or great bodily injury. Mr. Gottula had given every indication of his intention to use the bat violently. Mr. Gottula's behavior, throughout the entire encounter, indicated he wanted the Deputy and Officer to believe he would hurt them with the bat. Mr. Gottula appeared to be trying to do so at that moment and he was within several feet of accomplishing his apparent goal.

The TPD Officer observed Mr. Gottula advancing towards the HSC Deputy bat in hand. It appeared to the Officer that the Deputy's rounds were not having effect. The Officer later described that Mr. Gottula seemed to believe he was "unstoppable" and it was like a "bad dream." The TPD Officer drew his service weapon and also began firing at Mr. Gottula.

#### CONCLUSION:

The minds of the law enforcement personnel involved in this case from beginning to end were focused on stopping Mr. Gottula's dangerous and threatening behavior in the least violent manner possible. They were required to do so with not only their safety in mind but the safety of several citizen bystanders that had gathered in the immediate vicinity of the encounter.

From the beginning of the encounter until its conclusion, Mr. Gottula showed focus and determination to cause harm to the Law enforcement. Mr. Gottula chased the TPD Officer with a metal


baseball bat, opened the Officer's door to get to him, and nearly got close enough at one point to strike the Officer. Mr. Gottula was hit by a vehicle multiple times and targeted with a Taser, yet he would not yield his assault. Most notably, Mr. Gottula refused to drop the baseball bat throughout the entire encounter. Never once did Mr. Gottula give any indication he intended to surrender. Mr. Gottula refused to accept any outcome other than hurting one or both of the peace officers or be stopped by some level of force. Mr. Gottula was given ample opportunity to avoid this outcome. He simply would not stop the violence. Likely, Mr. Gottula's mental illness played a role in his dangerous and terrifying behavior. However, nothing about Mr. Gottula's mental illness reduced the right of the Deputy or the Officer to defend each other or themselves from violent attack.

Between the two law enforcement personnel more than twenty rounds were fired at Mr. Gottula. Mr. Gottula was shot numerous times. Also, it is apparent that the HSC Deputy fired several rounds at Mr. Gottula after he was going down or on the ground. These facts do not change the ultimate opinion that no charges will be filed. The Deputy fired his weapon very rapidly which is common in traumatic life or death self-defense shootings. That the Deputy's very personal trauma experience caused him brief delay in recognizing the threat to his life had probably ended, does not convert this into a criminal matter.

The HSC Deputy had legitimate reason to believe that any further delay in firing his weapon would have resulted in great harm to himself. The HSC deputy acted reasonably under Wyoming law. No criminal charges will be filed.

The TPD Officer had legitimate reason to believe Mr. Gottula was determined to cause great harm to the HSC Deputy and any further delay in firing his weapon could have resulted in great harm to the Deputy. The TPD Officer acted reasonably under Wyoming law. No criminal charges will be filed.

The Special Prosecutor will take no further action in this matter.

  
Patrick J. LeBrun, Special  
Appointed Prosecutor