

## Sixth Annual Report of the Deadly Force Review Panel

January 2026

### Introduction

As required by 5 M.R.S. § 200-K, the Maine Deadly Force Review Panel held regular meetings in 2025 to review deadly force incidents by law enforcement officers and submit reports to the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary of the Maine Legislature. The reports evaluated whether accepted and best practices were followed under the circumstances, or if modifications or improvements were needed. The Panel is also responsible for recommending ways to enhance standards, including changes to statutes, rules, training, and policies and procedures, to promote best practices that improve public and officer safety. The Panel generally reviews cases in the same chronological order as reports issued by the Attorney General.

The Panel requests feedback from involved law enforcement agencies regarding its reports. Although the Panel reviews cases involving the use of deadly force, it acknowledges that law enforcement responds to many more high-risk incidents every day that could have involved deadly force but were resolved peacefully.

The Panel is required by law to submit an annual report to the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary of the Maine Legislature, summarizing its work from the previous year, by January 30th. Since mental illness and/or alcohol and drugs are the primary factors in most of these incidents, the Panel is now also sharing reports with the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services and the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety. These reports document the Panel's review of deadly force incidents.

### Factual Summaries of Incidents Reviewed in 2025

#### ***#40 – Rangeley Plantation – Fatal Shooting of Shay McKenna***

On September 11, 2023, Shay McKenna missed his arraignment on a manslaughter charge, leading to the issuance of an arrest warrant. An investigation showed that Mr. McKenna was illegally camping in a van on private property in a remote part of Rangeley Plantation. Police found a campsite and a vehicle registered to Mr. McKenna's mother. Mr. McKenna was seen in the same vehicle in Mexico early that morning. At the campsite, officers discovered a makeshift firing range with a paper

target bearing apparent bullet holes. As part of his bail conditions, Mr. McKenna was banned from possessing firearms and weapons. Officers did not find Mr. McKenna at the scene, but a game camera near the site captured images of him carrying an AR-15-style rifle. The State Police obtained a search warrant for the campsite. The State Police Tactical Team, including Trooper Jeffrey Parks, arrived to execute both warrants. Mr. McKenna refused to surrender despite multiple commands, emerging from the van armed with the rifle, and was shot and killed by Trooper Parks.

#### ***#41 – South Portland – Fatal Shooting of Christafer Dodge***

On Friday, August 25, 2023, at 4:11 a.m., a woman called 911 from her apartment in South Portland. She whispered that Christafer Dodge was intoxicated, had assaulted her, and had fired a gun inside the apartment. While South Portland Officers Anthony Verville and Akos Szekely responded, Mr. Dodge left in his black Ford pickup truck with his AR rifle. Officers Verville and Szekely arrived and found evidence supporting the woman's report, including a broken clothing rack, rifle cartridge casings on the floor, and an empty rifle case on a bed. Within minutes, Officer Szekely saw a black Ford truck drive into the parking lot. Officers Verville and Szekely quickly ran outside to the lot. Mr. Dodge was driving, and as he parked, Officer Verville saw Mr. Dodge raise a rifle and aim it at him. Officer Verville then fired at the truck, resulting in Mr. Dodge's death.

#### ***#42 – Bangor – No injury to Linda Coburn***

Consideration of an incident on Sunday, June 25, 2023, involving the use of deadly force by Officer Bobby Lee Gillespie of the Bangor Police Department, which resulted in no injuries to Linda Coburn, age 39, of Bangor.

*The statute governing the Panel states that it “shall examine deaths or serious injuries resulting from the use of deadly force by a law enforcement officer.” In this case, although the officer used deadly force, there was no death or serious injury. Therefore, the Panel declined to review this incident because it was outside its statutory authority.*

#### ***#43 – Auburn – Fatal shooting of Joseph Arbour***

On September 27, 2021, Sergeant Steven Gosselin of the Auburn Police Department shot and killed Joseph Arbour, 36, after Mr. Arbour pointed a pistol at Sgt. Gosselin and ran on foot toward people and businesses in a busy part of Center Street in Auburn during the midmorning. Sgt. Gosselin was responding to a report that a woman was being held against her will at a motel. Wearing his uniform and clearly

recognizable as a police officer, Sgt. Gosselin called out to Mr. Arbour, asking to speak with him and telling him to stop, but Mr. Arbour kept walking. He was hunched over, wearing a backpack, and seemed to be holding something. Mr. Arbour made eye contact with Sgt. Gosselin but ignored repeated requests to stop. Mr. Arbour turned, raised his right hand, and pointed a black handgun at Sgt. Gosselin. In response, Sgt. Gosselin drew his sidearm and ordered Mr. Arbour to stop and put the gun down. Mr. Arbour then placed the gun to his head and threatened to kill himself. After another demand to drop the weapon, Mr. Arbour lowered the gun to his side and hurriedly moved toward Center Street. Sgt. Gosselin followed him across the street toward local businesses. Still refusing to stop or surrender his weapon, Mr. Arbour continued walking. Fearing that Mr. Arbour might shoot at him, someone else, or take a hostage, Sgt. Gosselin fired three shots at Mr. Arbour. The gunfire struck him, and he died at the scene.

#### ***#44 – Rumford – Fatal shooting of Sean Dyment***

On Monday, October 30, 2023, at 8:13 p.m., a woman called 911 and reported being closely followed by a vehicle after she had “honked” at it when it passed her on a side road near her home in Rumford. Dispatch advised her to drive to the Rumford Police Department immediately, where an officer would meet her in front of the building. Deputy Matthew Steinort and Corporal Joshua Aylward of the Oxford County Sheriff’s Office were patrolling the Rumford area. The two deputies, along with a Mexico police officer, heard the radio traffic and headed to the Rumford Police Department. A vehicle directly behind one of the deputies abruptly stopped in the roadway. The officers recognized the vehicle as the one reported by the 911 caller. Deputy Aylward recognized the driver as Sean Dyment, with whom he had interacted earlier in the evening when Mr. Dyment drove up to Cpl. Aylward’s parked cruiser, said “bad things are happening tonight,” and drove off. After a series of encounters that included Mr. Dyment operating his vehicle erratically with “go and stop” maneuvers and Mr. Dyment refusing to communicate with the officers except to threaten them, Mr. Dyment brandished an AR-style rifle and refused to relinquish it when ordered. When Mr. Dyment pointed the rifle directly at Cpl. Aylward and a Rumford police sergeant, Deputy Steinort and Cpl. Aylward shot at Mr. Dyment, who, struck by gunfire, was pronounced dead at a local hospital shortly afterward.

#### ***#45 – Naples – Nonfatal Shooting of Eric Sweda***

On Sunday night, January 14, 2024, Eric Sweda, home alone and intoxicated, called 911 nine times. He was at his residence on Horace Files Road in Naples. He was argumentative with the dispatchers before saying several things, including “I need help,” “I could shoot myself in the [expletive] head right now, but I’m not,” and “I’m asking you guys to take me in...nobody cares...I want to be taken in...it doesn’t

matter why....” Mr. Sweda had a history of being intoxicated and shooting a gun while at his residence. The deputies from the Cumberland County Sheriff’s Department who responded were familiar with him from prior calls. Several deputies, including Deputy Alexander Markellos, responded to Mr. Sweda’s home. At one point, Deputy Markellos saw Mr. Sweda raise an AR-style rifle and point it in his general direction. He then saw Mr. Sweda step off the threshold, exit the door, immediately raise the rifle, and sweep the barrel toward the tree line where other officers were taking cover. Mr. Sweda then fired what were believed to be three shots. In that moment, Deputy Markellos saw another York County deputy sheriff, nearby, fall to the ground, believing the deputy had been shot. Deputy Markellos fired at Mr. Sweda, hitting him once in the left arm. Mr. Sweda retreated inside but came out the front door and surrendered within minutes. He was taken to a trauma center and treated for a gunshot wound to his arm, a broken thumb, and lacerations to his left hand. Medical records indicated his blood-alcohol content was 0.31%, nearly four times the legal OUI limit.

#### **#60 – Westbrook – Fatal Shooting of Ryan Nichols**

*The review of this incident was expedited to address ongoing concerns raised by the Westbrook police chief that might be affecting other communities.*

On Saturday, November 30, 2024, at approximately 3:26 a.m., officers from the Westbrook Police Department responded to Arlington Avenue in Westbrook after receiving a report of a domestic assault. The caller, who was not at the residence, said that her brother, Ryan Nichols, was at the residence and that her mother had called to report that the brother was harming her and her husband. While responding, the officers learned that there were active arrest warrants for Mr. Nichols and his mother. They were also informed that Mr. Nichols was noted in the department’s records as suicidal. Around 3:30 a.m., Westbrook police officers arrived at the Arlington Avenue residence and located Mr. Nichols and two other individuals. Mr. Nichols was uncooperative and began fighting with three officers attempting to arrest him. He struggled with the officers for several minutes. Despite efforts to subdue him with less-lethal weapons, Mr. Nichols remained aggressive, uncooperative, and resistant. He ran across the street to a porch of a house, grabbed a large metal wind chime made of tubular pipes, and advanced toward the officers. Mr. Nichols tried to strike the officers with the metal pipes. Sergeant Brian Grasser and Officer Maxwell Sawyer fired their service weapons. Struck by gunfire, Mr. Nichols died from his injuries despite emergency medical efforts.

#### **#46 – Augusta – Fatal Shooting of Liban Mohamed**

Shortly after 11 p.m. on Sunday, January 21, 2024, a resident of an apartment building on Northern Avenue in Augusta called 911. He reported that a “Black man”

armed with a pistol had broken into his apartment and was preventing his girlfriend from leaving. The caller said he jumped out a window when the intruder went into the bathroom. Four Augusta police officers and a Capitol Police officer responded to the call. Officers located the apartment door on an outside third-floor balcony, announced themselves, and commanded the occupants to come out. Eventually, the caller's girlfriend came out of the apartment, saying the intruder was still inside. The intruder, later identified as Liban Mohamed, was then seen by officers at a third-floor window. Officers ordered him to show his hands, but he did not respond. He temporarily disappeared from view, but an officer heard him "rack" a gun and saw him return to the window. Mr. Mohamed fired at least one shot at the officers, hitting the pavement between two of them. One officer returned fire. Mr. Mohamed then started shooting from a doorway at two other officers and the caller's girlfriend. Both officers and a third officer returned fire. Mr. Mohamed retreated into the apartment, then was seen at the living room window. An officer fired several shots at him. Later, Mr. Mohamed was found dead at the living room window with a black handgun on the floor next to him.

#### ***#47 – Fryeburg – Fatal shooting of Kenneth Ellis***

During the early evening of January 30, 2024, a police officer in Conway, New Hampshire, was alerted about a pickup truck with Massachusetts plates driving erratically. Soon after, the officer saw the vehicle in a convenience store parking lot and noticed a man nearby enter the truck and drive away. The driver ignored the officer's signals to stop. The officer briefly pursued the vehicle but ended the chase in accordance with departmental policy. Hearing that the vehicle was heading toward Fryeburg, Maine, Officer Michael St. Laurent of the Fryeburg Police Department and an Oxford County Sheriff's deputy positioned themselves about half a mile from the state line in separate cruisers. Officer St. Laurent first stopped a vehicle of a similar description. While completing that stop, the deputy informed him he had spotted what was likely the fleeing vehicle from Conway, which was being driven recklessly. Officer St. Laurent then saw the vehicle speeding through an intersection and activated his emergency lights and siren. The vehicle weaved in and out of the opposing lane and sped through town at 90–100 miles per hour. It hit two cars turning into a parking lot and rear-ended a third, causing it to spin and flip over. The suspect vehicle then crashed into a snowbank. Officer St. Laurent exited his cruiser and ordered the driver, later identified as Kenneth Ellis, to show his hands. The driver ignored the commands, got out, and charged at Officer St. Laurent with a knife. The officer backed up while telling Mr. Ellis to drop the knife. When Mr. Ellis kept advancing and was within about ten feet, Officer St. Laurent shot him. Mr. Ellis died at the scene, holding the knife in his hand.

## **Recommendations to Law Enforcement**

Cruiser and/or body cameras should be mandatory equipment for all law enforcement agencies statewide. Officers should have the audio pack for the cruiser camera on their person when responding.

Furthermore, because of the importance of cruiser video and body-worn camera equipment, each law enforcement agency should designate an officer to serve as a liaison with the equipment vendor or installer to ensure that operational details are clearly communicated and later shared with other members of the agency.

When a law enforcement agency operates a drone, video and audio should be recorded to maximize the benefits of the extra data and promote transparency.

As the Panel has previously stated, measures should be implemented to ensure that victims of criminal acts receive appropriate support services to address the trauma related to an incident. The Panel remains concerned that these victims do not have sufficient post-incident services. The Panel reaffirms a recommendation from its Fifth Annual Report that future Internal Review Teams specify in their reports whether a referral was made for follow-up support and services for these victims and, if so, what that referral was. The Panel recommends a referral system with initial contact through cards printed with a QR code linking to a page like the [Office of the Maine Attorney General: Crime and Victims](#). Referrals should be assigned to investigators or EMS responders, not involved agencies. The existing “Crime and Victims” page should be updated to include a contact procedure for accessing victim and family support services.

When circumstances prevent the evacuation of residents at an apartment complex or nearby homes, the Panel has previously noted that shooting with a residential building in the background should be done with all reasonable precautions and avoided whenever possible.

When an agency’s Internal Review Team issues a report on its assessment of a deadly force incident and determines that all applicable agency policies were followed and effective, the report should include the factual information supporting that conclusion.

In situations where the suspect is identified as a convicted felon, the Panel recommends that law enforcement initiate an ATF trace of the suspect's firearm(s) to determine, if possible, from whom the suspect obtained the firearm(s). Illegal or negligent transfers may lead to prosecution, civil damages, or other appropriate actions.

As repeatedly emphasized, all law enforcement agencies involved in a deadly force incident should conduct a collaborative internal review.

Recognizing that officers who provide post-incident interviews are understandably stressed, likely fatigued, and traumatized, law enforcement officers should be mindful of the language they use, except when accurately describing conversations or statements made during interactions with the suspect. These post-incident interviews become part of the case record and will follow the involved agency and officer as the case progresses.

### **Recommendation to the Board of Trustees of the Criminal Justice Academy**

As noted in previous case reports, the Panel recommends that all law enforcement agencies involved in a deadly force incident jointly perform the required internal review. The Panel has consistently recommended that the Board of Trustees of the Maine Criminal Justice Academy update the internal review requirements to include this obligation.

### **Recommendation to the Legislature**

As background, please refer to the summary of Case #60 on Page 4 above involving the fatal shooting of Ryan Nichols in Westbrook on November 30, 2024.

Ryan Nichols struggled with severe mental illness and had a long history of violent behavior. Over the past five years, several criminal cases involving violence were dismissed after Mr. Nichols was found incompetent to stand trial. Each time, he was released back into the community without a proper treatment plan, and each time, he reoffended. For context, here is a summary of Mr. Nichols' recent violent history:

2020: Charged with aggravated assault for a random attack on a neighbor with a tire iron, leaving the victim unconscious in the street.

August 2021: While awaiting trial at the Cumberland County Jail, attacked a 72-year-old inmate, resulting in the victim being hospitalized with a broken pelvis.

October 2022: Assaulted a family member.

January 2023: Arrested for randomly attacking two strangers within minutes of each other.

At the time of the officer-involved shooting, Mr. Nichols had an active arrest warrant for a random attack on two strangers at a convenience store in Limington and was suspected of assaulting family members shortly before the incident. These incidents highlight significant gaps in Maine's mental health and criminal justice systems. People deemed incompetent to stand trial but who pose a consistent and serious risk of harm should not be repeatedly released into the community without proper treatment and close supervision. In the words of Westbrook Police Chief Sean Lally, "This was a tragic and completely unnecessary incident. It placed Westbrook officers in an unenviable position where they were forced to use deadly force to stop a violent threat, a situation that could have been avoided had Nichols been in a secure mental health facility or appropriate custodial environment."

The Panel recommends that policymakers review these systemic failures and implement meaningful reforms. The goal must be to ensure that individuals with severe mental illness who repeatedly behave violently receive the treatment and supervision they need, while also protecting the public and preventing incidents like the one that occurred on November 30, 2024, in Westbrook.

The Panel recommends updating Title 15, §101-D(5-A) as follows:

**Finding of Non-restorability.** If the court determines that the defendant is not competent to stand trial and there does not exist a substantial probability that the defendant can be competent in the foreseeable future, the court shall dismiss all charges against the defendant; and, unless the defendant is subject to an undischarged term of imprisonment, if the court has probable cause to believe the defendant poses a likelihood of serious harm as defined in Title 34-B, § 3801(4-A)(¶¶ A, B, or C), it shall order the defendant into the custody of the Department of Health and Human Services for an involuntary commitment examination under Title 34-B, § 3864. In issuing an order for a Title 34-B, section 3864 examination, the court shall include as part of the order the factual findings supporting its probable

cause determination. If the defendant is subject to an undischarged term of imprisonment, the court shall order the defendant into execution of that sentence, and the correctional facility to which the defendant is transported shall execute the court's order.

### **General Observations**

#### **Firearms**

Of the nine cases reviewed by the Panel, six of the involved persons had a firearm with which they threatened law enforcement, and four of those six firearms were AR-15 style rifles. Three of those six persons were legally prohibited from possessing a firearm.

#### **Drugs**

All of the involved persons had drugs or alcohol or a combination in their systems at the time of the incident, and three of the nine had methamphetamine in their systems.

#### **Weapons Restriction Orders**

Maine's so-called "yellow flag" statute, in effect since July 1, 2020, includes scenarios similar to many involving the use of deadly force by law enforcement. The ability of law enforcement to obtain orders to relinquish firearms and other dangerous weapons has likely prevented the use of deadly force in many cases. In 2025, law enforcement successfully obtained and executed 616 "yellow flag" orders. These were complemented by numerous weapons restrictions under Protection from Abuse orders, Cease Harassment orders, and bail conditions. Moving forward, the panel will note cases where an individual was subject to deadly force by law enforcement officers despite having a weapons restriction order in place.

Sampling of 2025 "yellow flag" orders:

1. A 60-year-old man picked up a handgun during an argument with his wife and threatened to shoot her and himself; he threatened "suicide by cop" if she called the police.

2. A 63-year-old man with firearms threatening to kill himself; when confronted by police, he implored them to shoot him.
3. A 46-year-old man making suicidal threats to family members; threatening to assault wife; threatened in the past to execute family members.
4. A 33-year-old man experiencing hallucinations of being followed by a black cow, as well as dogs in his car, continuously discharging firearms in the neighborhood, threatened to kill a neighbor and her husband; a protective custody warrant was obtained.
5. A 39-year-old man told his sister that “someone is going to die tonight,” told his mother he was going to kill several people; threatened “suicide by cop” if police called; multiple past involvements with law enforcement; a protective custody warrant was obtained.
6. A 29-year-old man claims he’s being ordered to kill his parents or son; referenced Robert Card, the Lewiston mass shooter.
7. A 17-year-old boy threatened “suicide by cop,” ran into the road, and was struck by a vehicle.
8. A 23-year-old man armed with a shotgun during an argument with his wife, told his wife that if police were called, he would “go Waco” on them and her.
9. A 64-year-old woman threatened suicide with a knife before being disarmed; she attempted to gain access to a firearm before eloping to the woods, where game wardens found her.
10. A 24-year-old man expressing suicidal and homicidal ideations daily, thoughts of shooting or stabbing as many people as possible, and extreme guilt over thoughts that he may be a pedophile.
11. A 57-year-old man made suicidal threats to wife, including “suicide by cop” if she called the police; armed with a handgun when located by police.
12. A 38-year-old man posting photos of a cache of firearms on social media and saying Robert Card did the right thing, threatening to kill “street racers” and making other homicidal threats.
13. A 13-year-old boy, prohibited from participating in school wrestling, threatened to “kill and gut” the school principal; a knife was found in his backpack at school; he made suicidal threats to his mother.

### **Panel Membership**

The Panel is composed of 15 members by statute. However, it has operated with only 11 members for a significant period; vacancies are noted below.

The Commissioner of Public Safety, ex officio – **Michael Sauschuck**.

The Director of Investigations for the Office of the Attorney General, ex officio – **Anna Love**.

The Director of the Maine Criminal Justice Academy, ex officio – **Lincoln Ryder**, represented by **Joshua Daley**.

The Chief Medical Examiner, ex officio – **Alice Briones, D.O.**, represented by **Sandra Slemmer**.

An attorney representing plaintiffs in actions under 42 United States Code, Section 1983, appointed by the Attorney General - **Vacant**.

A municipal police chief appointed by the Attorney General – **Jack Clements**, Chief of Police, City of Saco.

A county sheriff appointed by the Attorney General – **Joel Merry**, Sheriff, Sagadahoc County.

A mental health professional appointed by the Attorney General – **Benjamin Strick**, Vice President of Adult Behavioral Health, Spurwink Services.

A representative of a statewide collective bargaining organization for law enforcement employees, appointed by the Attorney General – **Vacant**.

A representative of a statewide civil rights organization whose primary mission is related to racial justice, appointed by the Attorney General – **Michael Alpert**, Greater Bangor Area Branch NAACP.

An attorney representing defendants in actions under 42 United States Code, Section 1983, appointed by the Attorney General – **John Chapman, Esq.**

A criminal prosecutor appointed by the Attorney General – **Stephen Burlock, Esq.**, Panel Vice-Chair & Secretary.

Three citizens, each of whom is not and has never been a sworn law enforcement officer, appointed by the Attorney General – **Fernand LaRochelle**, Panel Chair.

The remaining two citizen seats are vacant.

### **Staff**

Brian MacMaster, Retired Chief of Investigations, Maine Office of the Attorney General.

All Panel members and staff serve without compensation or reimbursement of expenses.

An ex officio Panel member may appoint a designee to represent the ex officio member on the Panel for one or more meetings. A designee, once appointed, qualifies as a full voting member of the Panel and may hold office and enjoy all the other rights and privileges of full membership on the Panel. The Panel members appointed by the Attorney General serve for three years or until their successors are duly appointed, whichever is longer.

The Panel shall annually elect a chair and a vice-chair from among its members. The vice-chair shall also serve as secretary. The Panel shall meet at such times as reasonably necessary to carry out its duties, but it shall meet at least once in each calendar quarter at such place and time as the Panel determines or at the chair's call. The Panel met nine times in 2025.

The individuals serving on the Panel are appointed to bring their professional expertise to bear in discussing these complex cases. Thus, members of the Panel may know or have had contact with individuals involved in the case under review. In such situations, members report such affiliations to the Panel, and that information is recorded in the meeting minutes. If Panel members determine that they have a conflict of interest, they are recused from voting on the Panel's observations and recommendations regarding that case.