



For Immediate Release:

Chris Hopper  
Director of Communications  
[chopper@da17.state.co.us](mailto:chopper@da17.state.co.us)  
[da17media@da17.state.co.us](mailto:da17media@da17.state.co.us)  
(303) 835-5639

July 10, 2025

## **Decision Letter:**

Attached is the decision letter issued by District Attorney Brian Mason related to the officer-involved shooting of William Skells on October 9, 2024.

# # #

*District Attorney Mason assumed the oath of office on January 12, 2021. The 17<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Attorney's Office endeavors to seek justice on behalf of the citizens of Adams and Broomfield counties in felony and misdemeanor cases. DA Mason and his staff are dedicated to transforming the criminal justice system to better serve the citizens of the 17<sup>th</sup> Judicial District.*

*[AdamsBroomfieldDA.org](http://AdamsBroomfieldDA.org), Facebook: [@da17colorado](https://www.facebook.com/da17colorado) Twitter: [@da17colorado](https://twitter.com/da17colorado)  
Instagram: [@da17colorado](https://www.instagram.com/da17colorado) YouTube: [ColoradoDA17](https://www.youtube.com/ColoradoDA17)*



July 9, 2025

Thornton Police Chief Jim Baird  
9551 Civic Center Drive  
Thornton, Colorado 80229

RE: The officer-involved shooting of Mr. William Skells on October 9, 2024

Dear Chief Baird:

This letter is a review of the 17<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) investigation into the October 9, 2024, officer-involved shooting of William Skells. The 17th Judicial District Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) conducted the investigation, led by Adams County Sheriff's Department Detectives Hill and Jenkins. The remaining investigators on the CIRT who worked on this investigation are associated with law enforcement agencies independent of the Thornton Police Department. The Office of the District Attorney concludes that the investigation was thorough and complete. This letter includes a summary of the facts and materials that the CIRT presented for review, along with my pertinent legal conclusions.

This review is limited to determining whether any criminal charges should be filed against the involved officer for a violation of Colorado law. The standard of proof for filing a criminal case is whether there is sufficient evidence to prove all the elements of a crime beyond a reasonable doubt. The prosecution also has the burden of proving beyond a reasonable doubt that the use of force was not legally justified. This independent investigation and review is not intended to take the place of an internal affairs investigation by your agency. The 17<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Attorney's review does not evaluate compliance with departmental policies, standards, or procedures.

I find the actions of the involved officer to be legally justified in this incident. Furthermore, based on the evidence presented and applicable law, there is no reasonable likelihood of proving the elements of any crime beyond a reasonable doubt against the involved officer. Therefore, no criminal charges will be filed against the officer involved in this incident.

### **FACTUAL SUMMARY OF THE INCIDENT**

On October 9, 2024 at approximately 7:59 a.m., Thornton Police Department received a call for service regarding a check of well-being and shots fired at the address of 16024 Columbine Street in Thornton. The reporting party explained he heard a fire alarm going off and observed smoke at the residence. The reporting party also described hearing gunfire coming from inside the residence. The call out was aired as a priority and Thornton Police officers responded to the scene emergent.

Upon arrival, the officers worked to set up a perimeter around the residence, with police units set up on Columbine Street and on East 160<sup>th</sup> Place, providing officers with visuals on both the front and rear of the residence. Officers simultaneously worked to develop a communication plan to engage with the sole occupant of the residence, William Skells. Initial communication was made with William Skells' mother who confirmed that William Skells was the only one inside the residence.

The police stationed several teams on the front of the residence to include vehicles that were stationed on Columbine Street. A citizen-owned, parked, black Chevrolet Silverado provided cover and observation for Officer Lowe, Officer Richardson, Officer Quarantino, Officer Luebker, Officer Ramazaukas and a civilian co-responder. A marked Thornton Police vehicle, unit 638, provided cover and observation for Officer Kingsley and Officer Antillon. Another marked police vehicle provided cover and observation for Sergeant Hendrixson and Officer McCabe.

Additional officers were positioned at the rear of the residence. Officer Snyder and Officer Smedley were positioned on East 160<sup>th</sup> Place, to the east of the residence, providing them a vantage point of the rear of the residence. Officer Snyder was associated with an unmarked silver Explorer and Officer Smedley parked his marked Thornton Police vehicle on East 160<sup>th</sup> Place. Additionally, a citizen-owned black Dodge Ram truck was also parked on the East 160<sup>th</sup> Place that provided cover for Officer Snyder. Officer Smedley and Officer Snyder made initial observations of the home's rear sliding door being open, with smoke coming out of the residence. The officers could hear an audible fire alarm coming from inside the residence. At times, Officer Snyder, due to his position towards the rear of the residence, could hear William Skells inside the residence yelling and screaming.

Officer Richardson, who was positioned behind the Chevrolet Silverado on Columbine Street, worked to communicate with William Skells. Officer Richardson, trained in crisis intervention, used a bullhorn in an effort to communicate with the suspect. Officers could hear yelling from inside the residence, but the communication was unclear. Officer Richardson continued efforts to establish a line of communication with William Skells, but was unable to hear the communication coming from inside of the residence. Due to Officer Snyder's position near the rear of the residence, Officer Snyder was able to hear some of the statements from William Skells and relayed those to Officer Richardson over the radio. Officer Richardson utilized that information to respond to William Skells.

At approximately 8:40 a.m., Officer Snyder and Officer Smedley heard a single gunshot come from inside the residence. Based on the officers' training, the round fired inside the residence was consistent with a handgun. Officer Snyder believed that William Skells was positioned close to the rear door, although William Skells was not visible to the officers due to the smoke inside the home. At approximately 9:05 a.m., three shots were fired in the direction of Officer Smedley from inside the residence. Officer Snyder observed the bullet trail move through the smoke and observed damage to the rear doorframe from a bullet impact. The officers aired over the radio that gunfire was now coming out of the southside of the residence. Neither Officer Snyder nor Officer Smedley were impacted by the bullets or returned fire at this time.

After the three initial shots fired by William Skells towards Officer Snyder and Officer Smedley, Thornton Police Department continued to make efforts to engage with William Skells. The crisis negotiation unit attempted to establish contact, but despite these efforts, consistent and effective communication was unsuccessful. William Skells demeanor fluctuated, as he appeared to become more agitated, making statements that the "CIA is doing PsyOps" on his home.

As the scene continued to develop, residents were coming out of their homes and were advised by the police to leave the area or stay indoors.

At approximately 9:12 a.m., Officer Richardson heard a single gunshot that he recognized as being fired from a rifle. The officers positioned near the front of the residence, behind the black Chevrolet Silverado, reacted to the shot, but no one was impacted. There was a momentary lull, where Officer Richardson continued to try and communicate with William Skells using the bullhorn. William Skells claimed he was going to surrender. Officer Richardson told William Skells to come out of the residence with nothing in his hands and they would get him help. William Skells did not surrender, however.

Officers observed movement in the garage area, at which point gunfire came from inside the garage. Initially, three shots were fired from the garage towards the officers. Officer Richardson, Officer Lowe, and Officer Quarantino were positioned behind the front of the Chevrolet Silverado. Officer Ramazaukus was towards the rear of the vehicle shielding the co-responder, who had no protective gear. The bullets shattered two front windows of the Chevrolet Silverado with such force that Officer Lowe's glasses were knocked off his face, causing him blurry vision. Officer Lowe immediately ran from behind the truck to where Sergeant Hendrixson was positioned.

At this same time, William Skells shot Officer Richardson in the shoulder. In addition to being wounded in the shoulder, he also received a laceration to his chin. Officer Quarantino, who was standing directly next to Officer Richardson but was not injured, later stated his feeling that "we were going to die that day." Officer Quarantino returned fire towards the garage. There is no evidence that the round fired by Officer Quarantino contacted William Skells. After Officer Quarantino fired a shot, William Skells momentarily stopped firing at the officers. The radio traffic was updated that an officer was down. Then, Skells fired an additional five shots at the officers.

At approximately 9:16 a.m., Officer Kingsley and Officer Antillon, who were positioned behind a marked Thornton Police Department vehicle in the front of the residence, were also targeted by William Skells. William Skells fired approximately nine rounds in their direction. Officer Antillon and Officer Kingsley moved to the rear of the vehicle for additional cover and were uninjured.

After a break, a third volley of gun fire came from inside the garage towards the officers at the front of residence. Officer Quarantino estimated an additional six to eight shots were fired towards the officers. The officers were pinned behind the vehicles that were providing them cover during the gunfire. The officers were unable to see William Skells during this exchange as he had a tactical advantage with his vantage point in the garage. Once the firing stopped, Officer Luebker used a shield to provide cover for the wounded Officer Richardson as he was extracted from the area to receive medical attention. Officer Richardson was transported to a nearby hospital and treated for a gunshot wound to his left shoulder and laceration to his chin. Officer Lowe was also transported to a nearby hospital for treatment of multiple lacerations to his face.

From Officer Snyder and Officer Smedley's position on East 160<sup>th</sup> Place, they could hear the gunfire at the front of the residence but were unable to see what was occurring. They received updated radio reports that an officer was down, and they perceived the worst-case scenario had occurred; that an officer had lost his life. Officer Snyder later described the evolving situation "as close to war as we get." At approximately 9:28 a.m., William Skells walked outside the backdoor onto the back patio area without anything observed in his hands. Officer Smedley was positioned approximately forty to fifty yards away behind a marked Thornton Police Department vehicle. Officer Snyder was positioned behind a black truck, closer to the back patio of the residence but still with an obstructed view. Officer Snyder and Officer Smedley provided repeated commands to William Skells while he was outside, including: "Thornton Police, show us your hand, put your hands up."

William Skells initially complied and put his hands in the air, but then put his hands down and sat on an outdoor couch on the patio. At times William Skells would put his hands up, then return them to his lap, grabbing around his leg and waist area. Officer Smedley was unsure if Mr. Skells had a weapon at this time and asked Officer Snyder if he could see Mr. Skells' hands. Officer Snyder responded he could not see, as his view was obstructed.

Officer Snyder worked to build a rapport with William Skells, asking him basic information. William Skells would not engage with the Officer Snyder. William Skells continued to put his hands up and then his hands back in his lap. It appeared that William Skells was surveying the area to identify where the officers were positioned. At this point, after having given Mr. Skells the opportunity to surrender peacefully, officers were concerned that Mr. Skells had identified their location that and he would return inside, take a position of cover, and seek to shoot and possibly kill police officers, as he had done to the police officers stationed at the front of his residence.

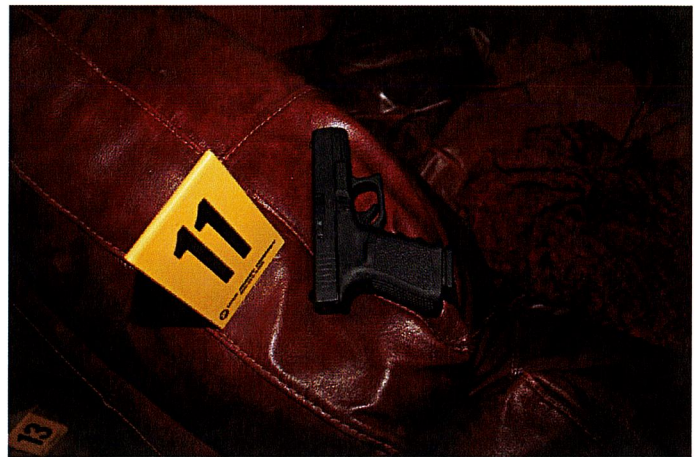
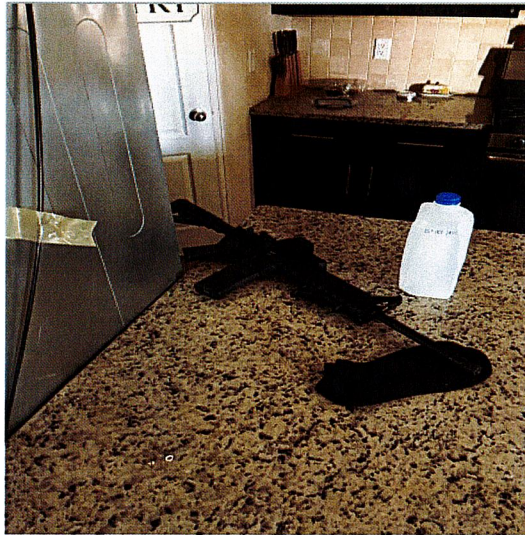
William Skells ultimately stood up and began to move towards the door to return into the residence. Officer Snyder gave him repeated commands to stop and not to go back into the house. William Skells ignored the commands. Then, at approximately 9:29:30 a.m., Officer Smedley fired two shots towards William Skells to prevent him from entering the residence and accessing the firearms. One round impacted William Skells and the second round impacted the patio. In describing his decision to shoot, Officer Smedley noted that an officer had already been shot in the front of the residence in multiple rounds of gunfire and that William Skells posed an ongoing threat to the officers and the community and was not going to give up. Officer Smedley believed this was the only opportunity to stop William Skells.

Officer Snyder also perceived the threat posed by Williams Skells and pulled the trigger on his rifle to stop the threat. Due to a malfunction, Officer Snyder's rifle did not fire. Officer Snyder cleared the malfunction by ejecting the round in the chamber. Both officers believed they could not allow William Skells back into the residence to retrieve additional firearms and continue to shoot and try to kill officers or others nearby. Officer Snyder and Officer Smedley were in fear for their lives, other officers' lives and the lives of residents and citizens in the area. Officer Smedley was equipped with a body-worn camera that captured the shooting incident. The video corroborates the evidence on scene as well as Officer Smedley's recollection of the incident.

After being impacted by the bullet, William Skells reentered the residence and officers lost sight of him. Officer Snyder again announced the police presence and asked if he needed medical assistance. The officers did not receive a response. For officer safety, a drone was sent into the residence to evaluate the scene and identify Williams Skells' location. The SWAT team then entered the residence and confirmed William Skells was inside and deceased.

## **CRIME SCENE INVESTIGATION AND AUTOPSY**

Criminalists assigned to the CIRT gathered evidence and processed the scene. Inside the residence, a .40 caliber Glock was located on the sofa in the shared kitchen and living room area. Numerous spent .40 caliber and 5.56 rifle shell casings were located in the kitchen area. A Ruger AR15 was located on the kitchen island. Both firearms had a round loaded in the chamber. Additional ammunition for both firearms were located in bedrooms within the residence.



An examination of the interior of the residence included bullet impacts through the master bedroom door, drywall near the back patio door and damage to the rear windows. The basement contained recently burned furniture and accelerant. The attached garage is accessible from a small hallway near the kitchen and several steps down into the three-car garage. In the garage were seventeen 5.56 rifle casings and one .40 caliber pistol casing were located on the floor of the garage. The wall and cabinets in the garage could provide a barrier and limit visibility from an exterior perspective. The barrier and casings correlated to where William Skells was likely positioned while firing at the officers. The most northern pane of both the single car and double car garage doors contained clusters of bullet holes, several of which were identifiable as being fired by a rifle from inside the garage. From the scene, it was estimated that William Skells fired at least thirty-one rounds.

A neighboring home located at 25360 E. 160<sup>th</sup> Place was struck by a bullet impact during the incident in the exterior wall above the garage door.

An examination of the back patio demonstrated the patio at higher elevation than East 160<sup>th</sup> Place, providing a clear view from the patio to the neighboring residence, individuals and vehicles in the roadway.



*View of East 160th Place from back patio 16024 Columbine Street.*

The outside scene included vehicles that provided cover for the officers that were positioned on Columbine Street and East 160<sup>th</sup> Place. The black Chevrolet Silverado that was providing cover for officers in the front of the residence had six bullet impacts. All the bullet holes were found on the driver's side of the vehicle coming from the direction of William Skells' residence. The driver's window was shattered but still intact with at least two bullet holes in the window. Bullet holes were also located in the driver's side door and in the hood of the truck. Just south of the truck was a FC 223 casing, consistent with the round fired by Officer Quarantino.



*Images depicting bullet impacts to driver's side and hood of Chevrolet Silverado.*

A marked Thornton Police Department vehicle, unit 638, that was positioned north of the residence had multiple identifiable bullet impacts, to include a bullet hole in the front windshield and the driver's side body of the vehicle.

A marked Thornton Police car was parked on East 160<sup>th</sup> Place, at the rear of the residence. Two FC .223 casings were located, consistent with rounds fired by Officer Smedley. Additionally, a single .223 cartridge was located in the roadway near the front of the black Dodge Ram Truck positioned on East 160<sup>th</sup> Place, consistent with Officer Snyder clearing the malfunction and ejecting an unfired round from

his rifle.

An autopsy was conducted at the Adams County Coroner's Office on October 11, 2024. Dr. James Caruso, forensic pathologist, performed the autopsy. William Skells suffered a single gunshot wound to the right side of the abdomen that injured his internal organs. This shot was consistent with the rifle round fired by Officer Smedley. There was no evidence of close-range firing. The cause of death was identified as a gunshot wound to the abdomen and the manner of death was homicide. Toxicology testing on William Skells was positive for ethanol, cannabinoids and nicotine.

### **DRONE AND MEDIA OUTLET FOOTAGE**

A drone was utilized during this incident in attempts to visualize William Skells location in the residence during the different instances of gunfire. The drone footage captured William Skells when he was outside on the back patio seated on the outdoor couch.



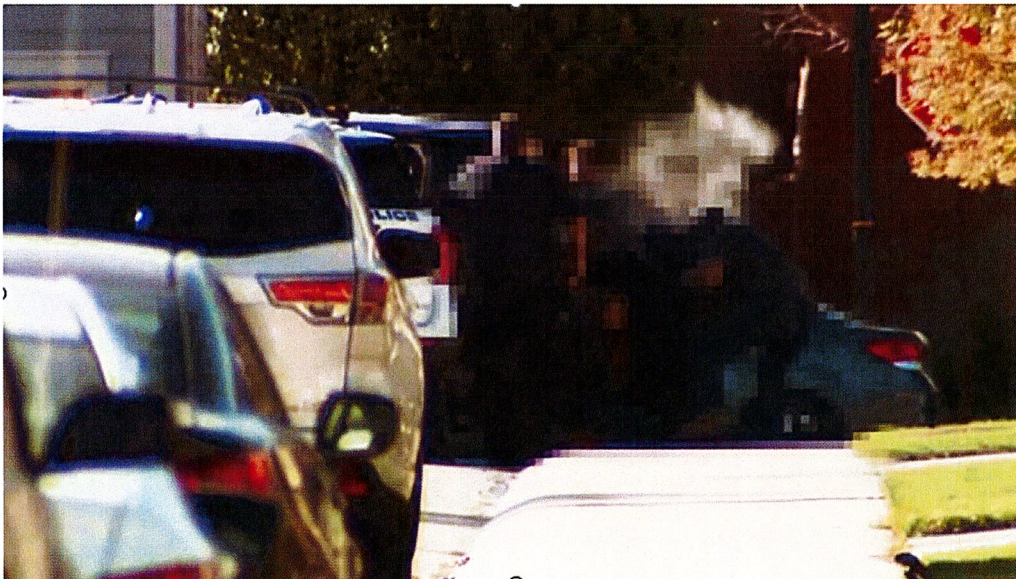
*Still image of Williams Skells seated on outdoor couch on the back patio.*

William Skells is observed on the outdoor couch making movements with his hands. He removes an item from the table and raises it to his lap. The drone video shows William Skells making movements around his pant legs. He then stood up and started moving towards the patio door with his arms raised. The drone had a different vantage point then the officers that were positioned on East 160<sup>th</sup> Place. When William Skells crossed the threshold of the doorway, he appeared to be impacted by a bullet on his side.



*Still image of Williams Skells moving towards the back patio door.*

A media outlet was present at the scene and video footage captured the initial shots directed at the officers at the front of the residence impacting Officer Richardson, Officer Lowe and the Chevrolet Silverado.



*Still image from 9-News footage demonstrating bullet impact on Chevrolet Silverado.*

## LEGAL ANALYSIS

As previously noted, this review is limited to a determination of whether criminal charges should be filed against law enforcement officer involved in this incident. The decision to file criminal charges involves an assessment of all known facts and circumstances as well as an evaluation of whether there is a reasonable likelihood of conviction at trial under the applicable law.

Criminal liability is established when the evidence is sufficient to prove all elements of a crime beyond a reasonable doubt. In addition to proving the elements of a crime, the prosecution must also *disprove*

any statutorily recognized justification or defense beyond a reasonable doubt. Consequently, to file a criminal charge, the District Attorney's Office must be able to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the involved law enforcement officers' actions were *not* justified under the circumstances surrounding this incident and the applicable law.

Under Colorado law, a law enforcement officer may use an amount of force – including deadly physical force – that is necessary and reasonable. Additionally, under Colorado law, police officers, like any other individual, have the right to defend themselves or others from the use or imminent use of unlawful physical force. An officer's right to use reasonable force is an affirmative defense, meaning that the prosecution must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the use of force was not justified. The affirmative defenses applicable to the officers' use of force at the time of this incident are found at §18-1-707, C.R.S. (2024), and the relevant portions of that subsection provide:

(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....

(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 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 provisions in this section, a peace officer is justified in using deadly physical force if the peace officers 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. §18-1-707, C.R.S. (2024),

In *Graham v. Conner*, 490 U.S. 386 (1989) a seminal U.S. Supreme Court case, the Supreme Court set

forth a standard of “objective reasonableness” in evaluating the use of force by a police officer. Under this standard, the inquiry into the appropriateness of an officer’s use of force must: (1) take into consideration the totality of the circumstances, including factors such as the severity of the crime at issue, whether the suspect poses an immediate threat to the safety of the officers or others, and whether the suspect is actively resisting arrest or attempting to evade arrest by flight; and (2) be judged from the perspective of an objectively reasonable officer on the scene “in light of the facts and circumstances confronting them, without regard to [his] underlying intent or motivation.” Further, the United States Supreme Court notes, “[t]he calculus of reasonableness must embody allowance for the fact that police officers are often forced to make split-second judgments—in circumstances that are tense, uncertain, and rapidly evolving—about the amount of force that is necessary in a particular situation.” *Graham v. Connor*, *supra*, 490 U.S. at 396-97.

Accordingly, applying the proper legal standard in this case, the critical inquiry is whether an objectively reasonable officer, confronted with the same facts and circumstances as Officer Robert Smedley, would have concluded that William Skells posed an immediate threat to the safety of the officer or another person such that the use of force, including deadly physical force, was necessary.

Here, Officer Robert Smedley responded to 16024 Columbine Street on a report of shots fired inside the residence and a possible fire. Officer Smedley, along with Officer Snyder, was positioned on East 160<sup>th</sup> Place to assist with a visual of the rear of the residence. At approximately 9:05 a.m. shots were fired from inside of the residence outside towards Officer Smedley and Officer Snyder. At that time, neither officer returned fire as they did not have a clear visual of the shooter.

Thornton Police Department continued efforts to engage with William Skells and deescalate the situation. At approximately 9:13 a.m., Mr. Skells fired several shots from the front of the residence towards the officers, where two officers were injured, and others were trapped behind vehicles. Officer Smedley was unable to see what was occurring at the front of the residence, but received updated radio reports that an officer was down, and he was concerned that the worst-case scenario had occurred and that an officer had been killed.

At approximately 9:28 a.m., William Skells exited the residence onto the back patio, which sat higher than the street, and provided him with superior vantage point to that of Officer Smedley and Officer Snyder. William Skells was observed initially exiting the residence without anything in his hands. Officer Smedley and Officer Snyder gave him repeated commands to keep his hands up and told him he was under arrest. Despite William Skells having just shot another officer, Officer Snyder tried to engage with Mr. Skells, build a rapport with him and convince him to give himself up peacefully. This effort was unsuccessful.

Officer Smedley was positioned approximately forty to fifty feet away from William Skells, who had taken a seat on an outdoor couch. Officer Snyder was positioned closer to the rear of the residence than Officer Smedley. Officer Smedley inquired of Officer Snyder if he had a visual of William Skells’ hands, and Officer Snyder noted his view was obstructed. William Skells again stood up and began to retreat towards the door to enter the residence, ignoring commands to stop and not go inside of the residence. Officer Smedley then fired two shots, one striking and fatally killing William Skells.

I find Officer Smedley’s actions to be legally justified in this matter. William Skells had already shot several rounds at multiple officers in the front yard, hitting and wounding one officer, while another officer was also wounded after Mr. Skells’ fired and shattered the glass on a vehicle. Officer Smedley evaluated the circumstances in this moment and worked to prevent William Skells from re-entering the residence, accessing additional firearms and then shooting at officers or member of the public again.

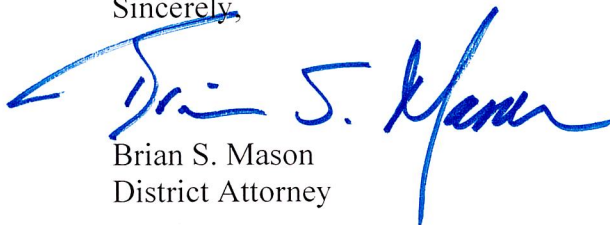
Officer Smedley credibly believed this was the only opportunity to stop William Skells, as they had given him every possible opportunity to peacefully surrender. Officer Smedley's actions were reasonable, appropriate, and justified under these circumstances. William Skells presented a clear threat to the lives of the officers and residents who were in the area. Law enforcement used verbal commands and crisis negotiators to prevent the suspect from harming anyone, all without success. William Skells' refusal to obey commands, and his repeated shooting of officers, shooting in the direction of officers and residents presented a clear and present danger to everyone in his vicinity. Officer Smedley's decision to shoot Mr. Skells eliminated the danger and very possibly saved the lives of officers and other innocent victims.

### **CONCLUSION**

Given the totality of the circumstances and evidence, the prosecution cannot prove that the involved officer was not justified in using reasonable force under §18-1-707, C.R.S. (2025). Therefore, applying the facts of this incident to the applicable law, the evidence does not support the filing of criminal charges against Thornton Police Officer Robert Smedley.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or if you believe that further investigation is warranted.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brian S. Mason", is written over the typed name.

Brian S. Mason  
District Attorney