

**STATE OF RHODE ISLAND  
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL**

*Peter F. Neronha  
Attorney General*



**INVESTIGATIVE REPORT  
September 13, 2024**

**Incident Type:** Death Investigation of Alanna Pappas  
**Incident Location:** 2508 Flat River Road, Coventry, R.I.  
**Incident Date:** May 11, 2023  
**Police Department:** Coventry Police Department  
**Involved Officers:** Multiple Coventry Police Officers

This Office conducted a full review of the facts and circumstances surrounding the death of Ms. Pappas as well as the applicable law concerning police use of force. This review was conducted pursuant to the Attorney General's Protocol for the review of police incidents involving custodial deaths. Based on this review, and for the reasons set forth below, we find that Ms. Pappas's death was not due to any force used by the police, and that the police did not use any unreasonable force in the arrest of Ms. Pappas.

The investigative material provided by the Coventry Police Department, the Rhode Island State Police and other governmental agencies and reviewed by this office included:

- Incident Reports – Coventry Police Department (CPD) – 7 pages
- Narrative with Supplemental Narrative for CPD Det. Lt. Ryan DeSisto – 4 pages
- Narrative for CPD Det. Brian Sullivan – 4 pages
- Narrative for CPD Det. Sgt. Kevin P. Nolan - 3 pages
- Narrative for CPD Det. Wyatt Q. Huston – 1 page
- Witness Statement of CPD Lt. Keith Clarke – 19 page transcript
- Witness Statement of CPD Off. Nicholas Bruno - 16 page transcript
- Witness Statement of CPD Off. Jason Greene - 9 page transcript
- Witness Statement of CPD Off. Justin Favreau - 5 page transcript
- Witness Statement of CPD Off. Zachary Mason - 9 page transcript
- Witness Statement of Coventry Fire Department (CFD) Asst. Chief Kevin Cady – 13 page transcript
- Witness Statement of CFD Lt. Arthur LaFazia - 13 page transcript
- Witness Statement of CFD Pvt. Tyler Fretts – 12 page transcript
- Witness Statement of CFD Pvt. Brennan Phillips - 14 page transcript
- Witness Statement of CFD Pvt. David Simpson - 9 page transcript
- Witness Statement of [REDACTED] - 30 page transcript
- CPD Dispatch Log – 4 pages
- Consent to Search Form – 1 page
- CPD Evidence Log – 1 page
- CPD Use of Force Policy – 8 pages
- RI EMS Patient Care Report – 15 pages
- RI State Fire Marshall Scene Log – 2 pages
- RI State Fire Marshall Incident Report – 7 pages
- RI Office of the State Medical Examiner Cause of Death and Autopsy Reports – 7 pages
- RI Dept. of Health Laboratories Toxicology Report – 5 pages
- Screen Shots of Interior Camera Video at [REDACTED] Flat River Road, Coventry, RI – 5 photos
- CPD and CFD Dispatch Recordings
- RISP Summary Report by RISP Det. Erik A. Mills – 35 pages

- RISP Forensic Services Unit (FSU) Incident Report – 1 page
- RISP FSU Documentation Photos of Scene – 176 photos

### Applicable Law:

When considering a police officer's actions which involve the use of force in his/her capacity as a peace officer, a two-part analysis is required. First, it must be determined if the officer's use of force in arresting or detaining the suspect was necessary and reasonable. If an officer's conduct is deemed to be necessary and reasonable, then the inquiry ends, and no criminal charges will stem from the incident. If, however, it is determined that the use of force was not necessary and not reasonable then an inquiry must be made as to whether the use of force meets the elements of an applicable criminal statute i.e. Simple Assault and Battery/Felony Assault. Since we find the officers' use of force to be reasonable, we need not engage in the second part of the analysis.

The Fourth Amendment protects "[t]he right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures." A "seizure" of a "person," can take the form of "physical force" or a "show of authority" that "in some way restrain[s] the liberty" of the person. Terry v. Ohio, 392 U.S. 1, 19, n. 16 (1968). An arrest or seizure of a person carries with it the right of police officers to use some degree of force. Graham v. Connor, 490 U.S. 386, 396 (1989). "All claims that law enforcement officers have used excessive force – deadly or not – in the course of an arrest ... or other 'seizure' of a free citizen should be analyzed under the Fourth Amendment and its 'reasonableness' standard...." Graham, 490 U.S. at 395; Tennessee v. Garner, 471 U.S. 1 (1985).

The Fourth Amendment instructs that the *degree* of force police are permitted to use must be "objectively reasonable" under the totality of circumstances. Tennessee v. Garner, 471 U.S. 1, 8-9 (1985). Relevant facts include "the severity of the crime at issue, whether the suspect poses an immediate threat to the safety of the officers or others, and whether he is actively resisting or attempting to evade arrest by flight." Graham, 490 U.S. at 396. The reasonableness of an officer's use of force "must be judged from the perspective of a reasonable officer on the scene, rather than with the 20/20 vision of hindsight." Graham, 490 U.S. at 396. The Supreme Court has held that the determination of reasonableness must allow "for the fact that police officers are often forced to make split-second judgements – in circumstances that are tense, uncertain, and rapidly evolving – about the amount of force that is necessary in a particular situation." Graham, 490 U.S. at 396-97. Critically, the reasonableness inquiry is an objective, not a subjective, one. The "question is whether the officers' actions are 'objectively reasonable' in light of the facts and circumstances confronting them, without regard to their underlying intent or motivation." Id. (emphasis added). The Supreme Court could not have made this clearer: "An officer's evil intentions will not make a Fourth Amendment violation out of an objectively reasonable use of force; nor will an officer's good intentions make an objectively unreasonable use of force constitutional." Id. at 397. In other words, in an excessive force case, for purposes of the first part of the test, it does not matter what is in the particular officer's mind at the

time of the use of force. What matters is what the reasonable officer would have done if faced with the situation at hand.

Rhode Island law must be applied in light of these constitutional principles. Under Rhode Island law, an arrest is made by the restraint of the person to be arrested or by his submission of his person to the custody of the person making the arrest. R.I. Gen. Laws § 12-7-7. Rhode Island law further provides that “no greater restraint than is necessary shall be used for the detention of any person, and no unnecessary or unreasonable force shall be used in making an arrest.” R.I. Gen. Laws § 12-7-8.

#### Statement of Facts:

On Thursday May 11, 2023 at approximately 2:43 p.m., Coventry Police (CPD) responded to [REDACTED] Flat River Road in Coventry for a report of a possible domestic disturbance. The owner of the single family home [REDACTED] called CPD from Florida where he was monitoring his in-home camera system. He reported to CPD that his nephew [REDACTED], was in a physical altercation with an unknown female in his house and he requested a police response.

Multiple CPD officers immediately responded and arrived simultaneously. Lt. Keith Clarke was the first officer to make contact with [REDACTED] at the front door. [REDACTED] answered the door in a sweat and with no shirt on. Smoke was visible inside the house and when [REDACTED] was asked about it, he said, “She lit the house on fire...I put it out.” He was detained in a nearby police cruiser by Off. Nicholas Bruno as Lt. Clarke and Off. Jason Greene entered the home in search of the unidentified female and the source of the smoke.

As Greene and Clarke searched the first floor, they noticed the bathroom toilet seat was charred and melted but not actively burning. After clearing the first floor, the officers went upstairs and knocked on a locked bedroom door. They could hear muffled sounds coming from inside the room as they called out for the door to be opened. Officers heard the faint sound of a female voice saying “no” in response, followed by more sounds of movement. Concerned for the safety of the female behind the door, Lt. Clarke called out multiple warnings that he was going to force entry into the room. Hearing no reply, Clarke kicked the door in.

As both officers entered the room, they saw a female, later identified as Alanna Pappas, hanging by her arms almost completely out of the window. Clarke reached for her arm to pull her back into the room. Greene leapt across the room in an effort to get hold of her torso and injured himself in the process. Pappas was clothed in just a bra and underwear and was wet so getting her back into the room was challenging for the officers.

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[REDACTED] later told investigators that for about two years he was in a dating relationship with Ms. Pappas.

Eventually, the officers pulled Ms. Pappas back into the bedroom and onto the carpeted floor. She struggled with the officers who were trying to handcuff her by flailing her arms and legs. Officer Bruno assisted Lt. Clarke and Officer Greene as they tried to subdue Ms. Pappas. During the struggle, the officers used their combined body weight to control her and handcuff her hands behind her back. No compliance strikes or weapons were utilized by CPD. Once she was handcuffed, the officers forced her to release a white substance wrapped in a napkin which was clenched in her hand. She continued to struggle with the police and refused to expel something she had in her mouth despite the officers' demands. Pappas was chewing on the item when paramedics from Coventry Fire Department (CFD) entered the bedroom.

Private David Simpson was the first member of the CFD to come in contact with Ms. Pappas. The police officers asked that he retrieve a surgical mask for Ms. Pappas to prevent her from spitting out the substance that was in her mouth and possibly endangering police and rescue personnel. Simpson returned with a mask and placed it over her mouth. As more paramedics arrived, Ms. Pappas was breathing and had a pulse. Within seconds, however, she started having seizures and convulsing. Paramedics decided to move her out of the house and into the ambulance as soon as possible. Prior to being placed on the stretcher, police moved the handcuffs from behind her body to the front at the paramedics' request. From [REDACTED] call to 911 to Ms. Pappas' removal from the home to an awaiting ambulance, approximately 32 minutes had elapsed.

As rescue personnel moved Ms. Pappas from the house into the ambulance, she stopped breathing and had no pulse. Her temperature was 104 degrees. CPR was performed and oxygen was administered as well as doses of Narcan and epinephrine. Within approximately ten minutes, her breathing and a pulse resumed. She was transported to Kent County Hospital. En route, her pulse weakened and eventually stopped. CPR and epinephrine were again administered and at the hospital she regained a pulse. As hospital staff were inserting a different breathing tube in Ms. Pappas' airway, they discovered and removed a small plastic baggie lodged in her trachea. Ms. Pappas was transferred to Rhode Island Hospital for more specialized treatment, but her condition worsened, and she was pronounced deceased on May 12, 2023, at 7:54 p.m.

Dr. Renee Stonebridge, Assistant Medical Examiner conducted an autopsy on Ms. Pappas on May 15, 2023. She found no significant blunt force injuries just "superficial lacerations, contusions and abrasions." As detailed in her autopsy report, the cause of death was determined to be "Hypoxic-ischemic encephalopathy (lack of adequate blood flow/oxygen to the brain) due to acute combined drug intoxication." Dr. Stonebridge also determined the manner of her death was the result of an accidental drug overdose. These conclusions are supported by toxicology tests on her blood that revealed the presence of [REDACTED]

### Legal Analysis:

In a situation involving a custodial death, our objective is to determine whether the death was the result of any action or inaction by the officers involved, and if so, whether the officers' actions were legally justified under the circumstances. In this case, the medical examiner's report clearly concludes that Ms. Pappas' cause of death was the result of an accidental overdose. The report noted no traumatic injuries and our review of the evidence in this case establishes conclusively that none of the officers involved in this incident used force that contributed to Ms. Pappas' death.

In responding to this incident, Coventry police were confronted with a bizarre set of facts which required split-second responses. The initial complainant and owner of the property, [REDACTED], was not even in Coventry but was calling from Florida and watching events through his in-home surveillance camera. [REDACTED] opened the door in a smoky haze and told officers that a female, unidentified at that point, had set a fire but he had extinguished it. [REDACTED] told police he was unsure where she was located in the home. Officers quickly worked their way to the second floor and heard a female voice behind a closed door and had to break it down to gain entry. Immediately they're scrambling to save Ms. Pappas from falling out a second story window. Once they get her inside, she struggles with the police and starts to convulse. In just a few short minutes, the situation confronting police transformed from a domestic disturbance to an arson to a rescue operation to a medical emergency.

There is no evidence to suggest that officers used any excessive force controlling Ms. Pappas and trying to get her medical aid. Officers Clark and Greene are to be commended for pulling Ms. Pappas back into the house and preventing her from falling onto the concrete patio below. According to [REDACTED], Ms. Pappas made a similar attempt to go out the window prior to police arrival. And while CPD did not have the benefit of body-worn cameras at this time, the statements of the two officers involved, the torn screen found on the patio, the open second-floor window and injuries to Officer Greene<sup>2</sup> all indicate that immediate police intervention saved Ms. Pappas from a dangerous situation.

Once inside, Ms. Pappas struggled with the three officers by kicking and thrashing her hands and legs. Paramedics were additional witnesses to her violent behavior. She refused to release the suspected narcotics clutched in her hand and secured in her mouth. Her erratic behavior gave police every indication that she was under the influence of an illicit substance. Officers reasonably used their hands and body weight to restrain her and keep her from further ingesting any additional drugs. None of the officers used any closed hand strikes or weapons in controlling Ms. Pappas. All of the witnesses, both police and rescue, are in agreement on that point and the medical examiner found no contradictory evidence. The few superficial injuries that Ms. Pappas sustained are consistent with her attempts to exit through the window and the

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<sup>2</sup> Officer Greene was treated for bruised ribs suffered while getting Ms. Pappas back into the house from the open second-floor window. (pg. 6 – Greene's statement)



physical force used by police and Mr. Danusis in restraining her. And, most importantly, none of those injuries contributed to her cause of death.

Furthermore, considering Ms. Pappas' erratic behavior, she clearly was a danger to herself and to the officers once she was brought back in the house. She was physically struggling with the police, not responding to voice commands, and trying to hide and ingest suspected narcotics while in the throes of an overdose incident. She had also already tried to start a fire and harm herself. All of these factors make it evident that it was objectively reasonable for the officers to place her in handcuffs to prevent any further harm to themselves or Ms. Pappas. Thus, for the safety of all who were present, handcuffing was the safest, least restrictive option which is consistent with Coventry Police policy.<sup>3</sup>

Once medical personnel began providing care, Ms. Pappas started to have seizures. Medical personnel asked that the handcuffs be readjusted so they could better administer medical care and get her comfortably on a stretcher. Notably, however, they did not ask that the handcuffs be completely removed. It was apparent to all on the scene that Ms. Pappas also had to be contained in order to receive medical treatment. As she was transported down the stairs on a stretcher, Ms. Pappas was breathing and had a pulse but that changed when she was taken to the ambulance. Once she was taken out of the house, the police did not have any additional contact with Ms. Pappas.

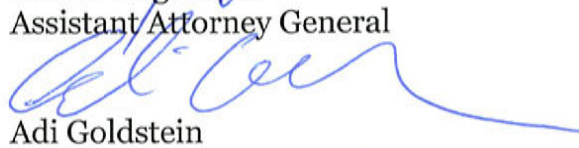
### Conclusion

It is clear from a thorough examination of all the evidence that the Coventry Police officers' interactions with Ms. Pappas were objectively reasonable and lawful. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the officers used excessive force or that the minimal force used contributed to Ms. Pappas' death. The officers used minimal force (handcuffs) to secure her which they reasonably believed was necessary to ensure her and medical personnel's safety. The handcuffs were re-adjusted at the request of rescue personnel in order to facilitate further medical treatment. Finally, the officers promptly, and without delay, sought and facilitated medical care for Ms. Pappas.

This matter is therefore closed.

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<sup>3</sup> Coventry Police Use of Force Policy 300.01, pages 7-8. Parameters for Use of Less-Lethal Force reads in relevant part: "Police officers are authorized to use department-approved less lethal force option to accomplish lawful objectives as follows: a.) To protect themselves or another from physical harm. b.) To restrain or subdue a resistant individual. d.) To maintain control of a person or situation."