



1543 Champa Street
Suite 400
Denver, CO 80202

P: 720.515.6165
F: 720.465.1975

rightslitigation.com

Luke W. McConnell, Esq.
luke@rightslitigation.com

Zach L. Shiffler, Esq.
zach@rightslitigation.com

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Contact: Raymond K. Bryant, Esq.
Luke W. McConnell, Esq.

Civil Rights Litigation Group, LLP
1543 Champa Street, Suite 400
Denver, CO 80202
Phone: (720) 515-6165
www.rightslitigation.com

Lawsuit Filed Regarding Officer Involved Shooting

Officers from the El Paso County Sheriff's Department and Manitou Springs Police Department Accused of Killing Florida Man

MANITOU SPRINGS, COLO. (APR 9, 2024) – Four police officers, Ronnie Hancock, Daniel Lebaron, Levi Hoover, and Jeffrey Schuelke, have been sued for excessive force related to the killing of Wilford Deweese, a CPA visiting Manitou Springs on his way back to Florida.

On April 11, 2022, officers were called to the scene in central Manitou Springs about a reported incident involving Mr. Deweese at a local bar. When police arrived, Mr. Deweese was confronted by officers outside in a central part of town. It has been widely reported by police and the press that during their encounter, Mr. Deweese fired without provocation at a police dog and also at police officers, which forced police to fire and kill Mr. Deweese. But nothing could be further from the truth.

Instead, the evidence demonstrates that police first provoked violence against a peaceful and non-threatening Mr. Deweese by sending a canine to attack him when he posed no threat to anyone and was simply too afraid to affirmatively walk 20 yards toward a vicious barking dog and a dangerous-looking firing squad of officers pointing their guns at him. Only after the canine was sent in to attack, and was in the process of attacking



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Mr. Deweese, did Mr. Deweese take out a firearm from his pocket and shoot downward and away from the officers at the canine in self-defense. He never aimed his gun at the officers or threatened to do so.

After the officers saw Mr. Deweese aim his weapon at the canine (but not at them), they opened fired with a barrage of 40-50 shots that hit Mr. Deweese 22 times killing him on scene. The shooting was plainly unconstitutional as the officers created their own feeling of danger by sending the canine to attack Mr. Deweese when they had no justification to do so, which caused Mr. Deweese to act in self-defense by attempting to stop the canine. None of the officers were actually in danger at any time.

At the time of the canine attack, Mr. Deweese was standing perfectly still, with his hands visible, talking on a cell phone, trying to reach an attorney. He had remained stationary and non-threatening for approximately 20 minutes while police officers from two different agencies surrounded and pointed their firearms at him. He did not verbally or physically threaten any of the officers in any way. Nor did he attempt to resist or flee from any purported arrest. In fact, he had nowhere to flee as the officers had surrounded him on a narrow path. He merely remained idle, talking on the phone, which the officers could see and identify. Mr. Deweese responded to the officers' questions and even showed them that he had nothing in his hands or waistband that would appear threatening to them. But police wanted Mr. Deweese to walk out to them.

After approximately 20 minutes of waiting for him to come out as demanded, the officers simply got tired of waiting and sent the canine to attack while they "rushed" in after the dog with only firearms drawn. The officers created an unreasonable danger for Mr. Deweese that could have only ended one way: a violent assault. Mr. Deweese died shortly after the shooting.

The officers had multiple non-lethal means they could have used. Additionally, the officers were trained not to use canine force once a suspect had been located, did not present an immediate danger, and was not fleeing. The officers' actions were not only against department policy but were wholly unnecessary and reached a quantum of force above and beyond that reasonably necessary under the circumstances.

Video of the incident can be found online:

<https://youtu.be/y3JJSmd Ufc>