

# Restraint of Agitated Individuals

National Academy of Sciences

Chief James J. Gerace



February 5, 2025



Are our officers ready as leadership prepared them?



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# What do we tell officers now?

“Get em up and off their stomach”

“Monitor their well -being”

*(But what does this mean to a young officer?)*

# Remember who are audience is

Not looking for perfection

\*Build a “Competent Novice”



\*Force Science. (2024). *The Expert Trap: Protecting Police from Unreasonable Expectations*.

# Key Takeaways Simple & Concrete

- Struggle Against Restraints = Medical Evaluation
- *How “exactly” are we moving from the street to the hospital?*
- *Remove Handcuffs?*



# Attorney General Considerations

New York State Office of the Attorney General

## Special Investigations and Prosecutions Unit

### Report on the Investigation into The Death of Troy Hodge



Letitia James  
NYS Attorney General

#### Restraint of Mr. Hodge and Aftermath

PO Burdick later told OAG staff that as she ran up the driveway, she heard yelling and then saw PO Barrancotta lying (face down) on top of a man who was lying on the ground, also face down; she said PO Bonito was trying to grab Mr. Hodge's arms, which PO Burdick described as flailing. Despite having PO Barrancotta on top of him and then PO Burdick kneeling on him, PO Burdick said Mr. Hodge continued to lift himself up with his arms. The three officers working together still could not restrain Mr. Hodge. At one point, PO Burdick said Mr. Hodge grabbed her vest and she punched him in the arm; he then grabbed her body camera, which she said she feared he would use as a weapon. PO Burdick said that Mr. Hodge was trying to bite PO Barrancotta and that she struck him in order to get him to stop; Lt. Pytlik arrived at this time.

Working together, the four LPD officers, joined near the end of the process by NCSO deputy Christopher Pino ("Dep. Pino"), were finally able to restrain Mr. Hodge with handcuffs behind his back, although he continued to struggle. By 11:49:19,<sup>24</sup> Mr. Hodge was finally restrained. *Struggle against restraints = Medical Emergency*

Under standard LPD practice, once an individual is in handcuffs, officers on-scene will request that a staging ambulance enter the scene; and indeed, in this case, there was an ambulance at the ready, staging approximately one minute away. However, due to the communications miscue described previously, the on-scene officers were unaware that an ambulance was staged nearby and therefore did not make that request. Rather, believing that an ambulance had been dispatched directly to the scene, they kept awaiting its arrival and ultimately wondered why it was taking so long to arrive.<sup>25</sup> *Dispatch take notice + Prompt officers when you hear he is in custody*

At 11:49:19 pm, NCSO Deputy Joshua Austin ("Dep. Austin") arrived on the scene, followed at 11:50:20 pm by NCSO Deputy Edward Finley ("Dep. Finley"). Both NCSO deputies were equipped with body-worn cameras and much of the subsequent interaction with Mr. Hodge is therefore captured in video footage ["The BWC footage"]<sup>26</sup> and may be accessed [here](#).

At the time of the deputies' arrival, the officers were outside the door of 213 Park Ave. with Mr. Hodge lying in the prone position in the driveway, hands restrained behind his back. Dep. Pino and PO Burdick were at Mr. Hodge's lower body (Dep. Pino essentially at Mr. Hodge's

<sup>24</sup> Since this portion of the incident was not captured on video, determining the exact time of restraint is impossible. However, Mr. Hodge was restrained by the time the NSCO BWC footage begins at 11:49:19 pm.

<sup>25</sup> If contacted immediately, the staging ambulance would have been on scene at least three minutes before the time that Mr. Hodge stopped making noise. An on-scene ambulance with a stretcher and crew focused on Mr. Hodge's health, would likely have meant that life-saving measures would have commenced sooner had Mr. Hodge become unconscious; he would also have reached the hospital faster. It is not unreasonable to suggest that but for the miscues brought about by the competing 911 systems, this tragic outcome may have been avoided.

<sup>26</sup> The OAG synchronized the footage from Deputy Austin's and Dep. Finley's BWCs so that they could be viewed simultaneously; the video was also lightened, to aid in viewing. Note that the time stamps on the BWC footage are different from the NC-911 times, which are used throughout this report.

# Attorney General Considerations

feet), PO Bonito and Lt. Pytlik by his trunk area, and PO Barrancotta near Mr. Hodge's head. Mr. Hodge was still vocal and was generally moaning "no" and other comments. Over the course of the next few minutes, the officers were primarily strategizing how to search Mr. Hodge's pockets for additional weapons.

At 11:51:20 pm, Lt. Pytlik advised that he was turning Mr. Hodge toward him so that other officers could check his waistband. Although Mr. Hodge cannot be seen clearly on the BWC footage during this time, the officers' statements on video – between 11:51:20 pm and 11:53:14 pm, when officers can be heard telling Mr. Hodge to "stop," "stop moving," "stop resisting," and "stop fighting" – indicate that he continued to struggle as they searched him. The officers removed keys, a pill bottle, and money from Mr. Hodge's person. At the direction of Dep. Austin, a defensive tactics instructor, the officers then crossed Mr. Hodge's legs and brought his feet toward his buttocks in an apparent attempt to keep Mr. Hodge still. As the officers were taking these steps, Mr. Hodge grew quieter and less frequently vocal. *Struggle against restraints = Medical Emergency*

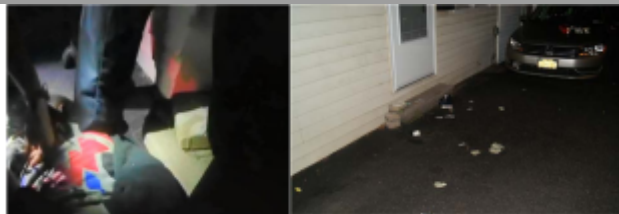
Similarly, Mr. Hodge's struggling decreased dramatically by this time. At 11:53:42 pm, Mr. Hodge began to move his arms again, and Lt. Pytlik told him to relax his hands and that they were trying to help him. Mr. Hodge began to move again at 11:53:59 pm, and Dep. Austin told him to leave his hand where it was. At 11:54:19 pm, Mr. Hodge began to move his arms, and again the officers directed him to stop moving.

At this point, PO Bonito can be seen on the video putting her foot on the area of Mr. Hodge's neck and shoulder as Mr. Hodge remained face down on the ground. PO Bonito's foot remained there, with some adjustments, until 11:55:44 pm. During the one minute and 25 second period of time her foot was on Mr. Hodge, he can be heard on the body-worn camera footage saying his girlfriend Nicole's name (faintly) at 11:54:29 and then faintly and intermittently moaning until 11:54:58 pm.

In a subsequent interview, PO Bonito told OAG staff that she consciously did not place her foot on Mr. Hodge's neck, but rather on his shoulder, and that at no time did she apply any meaningful pressure. PO Bonito insisted that she was well aware that applying pressure to a person's neck was potentially dangerous to that person and she would not – and did not – do so.<sup>27</sup> Rather, PO Bonito said, because her left foot was on the door stoop, she placed her right foot on Mr. Hodge's shoulder primarily as a manner of keeping her balance. It is impossible to gauge the accuracy of this statement from the video footage. Below are photographs displaying PO Bonito's foot in Mr. Hodge's shoulder / neck area as well as a photograph taken in the immediate aftermath of the incident, illustrating the space involved.

Her statement to OAG was important.

<sup>27</sup> Although PO Bonito stated she knew that putting pressure on a person's neck was potentially dangerous, the LPD did not ban such moves pursuant to its then-existing Use of Force Policy. We address LPD's Use of Force Policy below in Recommendation III. The former and current Use of Force Policies are attached (Exhibits 4 and 5).



Use our  
backboard  
technique

By this time, although the LFD members were on scene<sup>28</sup> and trained in Advanced Life Support ("ALS"), they were focused on calming Ms. Hodge, and assumed that the ambulance personnel would provide direct patient care when the crew arrived. Additionally, the LFD rig was not an ambulance and did not contain a stretcher. However, at 11:55:13 pm, the officers began to question where the ambulance was and strategize how they would transport Mr. Hodge to the hospital. The firefighters, PO Barrancotta, and Lt. Pytlik each contacted their dispatchers to clarify the status of the ambulance. At 11:55:51, after being contacted by the officers on scene, PO Morgan at LPD-911 called NC-911 asking the estimated time of arrival of the ambulance and (again, believing it had been originally dispatched to the scene) requested that the ambulance expedite its response. It was this call that led to the staging ambulance finally being notified (by NC-911) that it was clear to enter the scene. One minute and 19 seconds later, the TCA ambulance was at Ms. Hodge's home.

Shortly before the ambulance arrived, at approximately 11:56:16 pm, Lt. Pytlik placed his hand on Mr. Hodge's back; he later told OAG staff that he could feel Mr. Hodge breathing at that point. Dep. Austin, who was also on the ground with Mr. Hodge, can be heard on the video saying that Mr. Hodge was breathing. At 11:57:21 pm, Ms. Hodge asked the officers if Mr. Hodge was dead. Lt. Pytlik, who appears to have kept a hand on Mr. Hodge's back throughout this period of time, advised her that, "He's fine. He's doing fine over here. He's breathing. We're going to get him some medical attention now." At 11:57:30 pm, Ms. Hodge asked, "He's not dead, is he?" and the officers around Mr. Hodge replied, "No. He's not dead. He's fine."

At approximately 11:57:49 pm, the ambulance lights can be seen on the BWC video and it backs into the driveway shortly thereafter. At 11:58:43 pm, Lt. Pytlik pulled on Mr. Hodge's shirt and called his name in an apparent attempt to rouse him, but Mr. Hodge did not move. At 11:59:25 pm, just as the officers are preparing to place Mr. Hodge on a stretcher, Lt. Pytlik can be seen checking Mr. Hodge's carotid (neck) pulse. In a subsequent interview with OAG staff, Lt. Pytlik said at this point he thought Mr. Hodge may have stopped breathing, but because Lt. Pytlik was wearing gloves he could not feel a pulse when he checked Mr. Hodge's neck. Lt. Pytlik then began to shake Mr. Hodge and call his name.

<sup>28</sup> As noted, LFD had disregarded Disp. Ketch's direction to stage and went straight to the scene; Twin City Ambulance followed Disp. Ketch's directions.



# Backboard Technique





Backboard in Action

Even the Chief may use it



Backboard in Action

Even the Chief may use it



# Implications for Police Training

When do we END X a reality based training scenario?

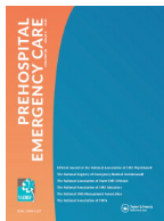
- Role players must display the behavior
- Test - Do your officers recognize the signs



# Will the Cops Remove Handcuffs?



# Get Police, Fire, EMS, and ER in the same ROOM!



Prehospital Emergency Care



ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: [www.tandfonline.com/journals/ipec20](http://www.tandfonline.com/journals/ipec20)

## Consensus Statement of the National Association of EMS Physicians International Association of Fire Chiefs and the International Association of Chiefs of Police: Best Practices for Collaboration Between Law Enforcement and Emergency Medical Services During Acute Behavioral Emergencies

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# Restraint of Agitated Individuals Questions?

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