Office of the New York State Attorney General Letitia James

Office of Special Investigation

May 15, 2025

Report on the Investigation into the Death of Geoffrey Parris

OVERVIEW

New York Executive Law Section 70-b (Section 70-b) directs the Attorney General's Office of Special Investigation (OSI) to investigate and, if warranted, to prosecute offenses arising from any incident in which the death of a person is caused by a police officer or a peace officer. When, as in this case, OSI does not seek charges, Section 70-b requires OSI to issue a public report describing its investigation. This is the public report of OSI's investigation of the death of Geoffrey Parris, who was shot and killed on February 12, 2024, by members of the New York City Police Department (NYPD).

On February 12, 2024, four officers responded to an apartment in Queens County, with their body worn cameras (BWCs) activated, after a 911 caller said he had heard gunshots from inside the apartment. Two officers spoke to Mr. Parris, who was in the doorway of his bedroom, and two officers spoke to Mr. Parris's brother, who was near the front door of the apartment (OSI does not publish the names of civilian witnesses). After some prodding, Mr. Parris's brother admitted he was the 911 caller and vaguely implied that he had needed to defend himself against his brother. Mr. Parris denied he had done anything to his brother, and the two officers speaking to him stepped away from his bedroom. The officers told Mr. Parris's brother they were going to leave and write up the matter as a domestic incident. At that point, Mr. Parris's brother told them Mr. Parris had a black gun and had pointed it in his face.

When Officers Christopher Ponce, James Wynne, and Tyliek Jerry walked back to Mr. Parris's bedroom to talk to him again, the door was closed. Officer Ponce knocked on the door, told Mr. Parris to open it, and said they had to talk. Mr. Parris opened the door and Officer Wynne tried to grab him. Mr. Parris ran to the back of the room. Officer Ponce told OSI Mr. Parris picked up a black gun and pointed it at him. The audio of his BWC captured Officer Ponce saying, "Drop it." Officer Ponce then fired his gun, striking Mr. Parris, who died of his wounds. A BB gun was later recovered from Mr. Parris's room.

Having thoroughly investigated the facts and analyzed the law, OSI concludes that a prosecutor would not be able to disprove beyond a reasonable doubt that Officer Ponce's use of deadly physical force against Mr. Parris was justified, and therefore will not seek charges against him.

FACTS

911 Call

On February 12, 2024, at 10:32 a.m., a 911 caller asked police to go to an apartment for which he gave the address (in Queens) and apartment number, because he had heard gunshots from within the apartment. (The 911 call, edited to delete the address of the incident, can be heard here.)

Body Worn Camera Videos

The narrative in this section is based on OSI's review of the BWC videos of Officers Ponce, Wynne, Jerry, and Shadasia Jones, and other officers. The BWC videos of the four named officers can be seen here: Christopher Ponce, James Wynne, Tyliek Jerry, and Shadasia Jones. The times mentioned in this section are taken from the time stamps in the BWC videos.

The BWCs showed that on February 12, 2024, at 10:43 a.m., Officers Ponce, Wynne, Jerry, and Jones arrived at the door to the apartment named in the 911 call. Officers Ponce and Wynne knocked on the door while Officers Jerry and Jones stayed in the hallway, away from the door. Geoffrey Parris's brother opened the door and, as he did so, BWC showed that he yelled back into the apartment, "Don't hide in your room, I'm going to put hands and feet on him. Don't hide in your room." Mr. Parris's brother was also speaking to someone on his cell phone, which was on speaker, during the initial conversation with the officers. The four officers entered the apartment.

The BWCs showed that at 10:44 a.m. Officers Ponce and Jerry spoke to Mr. Parris's brother near the front door of the apartment, while Officers Wynne and Jones went to speak to Mr. Parris, who stood in the open doorway to his bedroom.

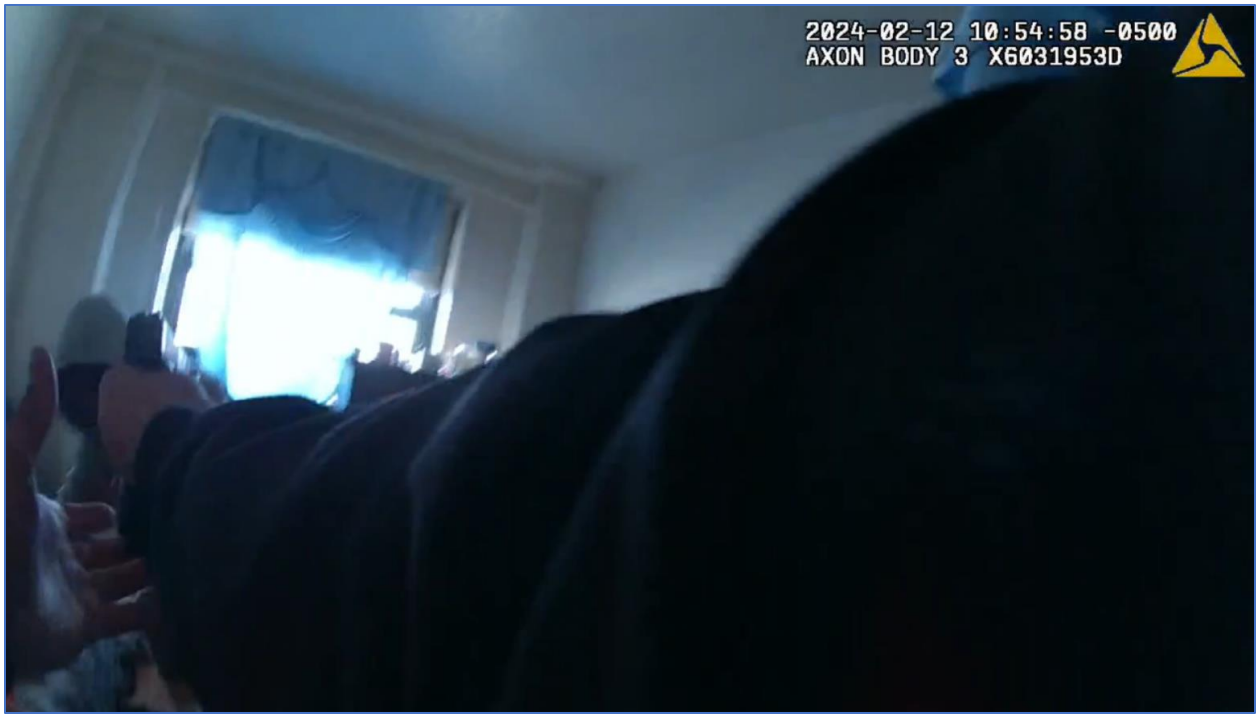
As captured on BWC, when Officer Ponce asked Mr. Parris's brother what had happened, he said he needed "to go break his [expletive] face, nothing happened, he is in there bugging the [expletive] out, [he is] my brother." Officers Ponce and Jerry said the police got a call for shots fired. Mr. Parris's brother admitted he was the 911 caller but would not confirm that shots were fired, saying only, "You need to go check him out in there." When Officers Ponce and Jerry asked Mr. Parris's brother if he had seen a gun, Mr. Parris's brother shrugged and said nothing. Officers told Mr. Parris's brother that if he wanted them to do something he would have to tell them something. At 10:48 a.m. an NYPD lieutenant, who had come to the apartment, told Officers Ponce and Jerry to write the matter up as a domestic incident report because Mr. Parris's brother was being uncooperative; the lieutenant left a minute later. Mr. Parris's brother said there was pepper spray on the wall because he used it to defend himself.

He said, “Ask him what’s in his pocket,” and yelled toward Mr. Parris (who was talking to other officers), “What’s in your pocket?”

BWC showed that Officers Wynne and Jones went to Mr. Parris’s bedroom and knocked on his door at 10:44 a.m.; Mr. Parris opened the door two minutes later. He said, “I called the police on him a few different times and nothing happened. This is the police reports I have against him. He’s just sitting here talking about me acting like he is trying to fight me.” Mr. Parris called over to his brother, “Now you want to call the cops because it looked like something happened to you?” Officer Wynne asked, “What is going on today?” Mr. Parris said his brother was lying and that he (Mr. Parris) had just woken up a couple of minutes before. Mr. Parris said his brother was talking about him and he was defending himself and then his brother called the police on him. He also said pepper spray was used in the apartment, though he did not say why or how.

Officer Ponce came over to Mr. Parris’s doorway at 10:51 a.m., and Officer Wynne related to him what Mr. Parris had said. Officer Wynne closed Mr. Parris’s door, and Officers Ponce, Wynne, and Jones walked over to Mr. Parris’s brother. At 10:53 a.m. Officer Jerry told Mr. Parris’s brother that they would write up a domestic incident report and leave because he was not being cooperative. Mr. Parris’s brother then said, “He didn’t tell you about the gun he had on him that he pulled on me.” He said Mr. Parris had pointed a black gun at his face.

Officers Ponce, Wynne, and Jerry walked back to Mr. Parris’s bedroom; Officer Jones stayed with Mr. Parris’s brother. At 10:54 a.m. Officer Ponce knocked on Mr. Parris’s bedroom door, told him to open the door, and said they had to talk. Mr. Parris opened the door, and Officer Wynne reached in and tried to grab his arm. Mr. Parris ran to the back of the room. Officer Ponce entered the room. At 10:54:58 a.m. Officer Ponce’s BWC captured him saying, “Drop it,” but his outstretched arms blocked the BWC’s view of Mr. Parris. One second later, at 10:54:59 a.m., Officer Ponce’s BWC captured the sound of his gun firing at Mr. Parris.



Still image from Officer Ponce's BWC at 10:54:58 a.m., showing him pointing his gun into Mr. Parris's bedroom before he fired.

Still image from Officer Ponce's BWC, at 10:54:59 a.m., when the BWC audio captured shots fired.

A slowed down, zoomed-in, and enhanced version of Officer Ponce's BWC at the time of the shooting can be viewed here.

No other BWC footage visually captured Mr. Parris holding a gun, as the other officers were outside Mr. Parris's room.

Officer Ponce went to the back of the bedroom where Mr. Parris was, placed Mr. Parris in handcuffs, and began to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR); other officers arrived and administered CPR. At 10:56 a.m. Officer Jerry asked, "Where is it?" and Officer Ponce said, "He dropped it over there." Officer Jerry's BWC showed him picking up a black gun from the floor by the wall. EMS arrived and began to aid Mr. Parris at 11:10 a.m. EMS took Mr. Parris to Jamaica Hospital where, according to medical records, he was pronounced dead at 11:57 a.m.

Still image from Officer Jerry's BWC at 10:56:24 a.m., showing him picking up the gun.

Officer Interviews

Police Officer Christopher Ponce

Officer Ponce told OSI he arrived at the apartment with Officer Wynne after they received a radio run for "shots fired" at the apartment. They knocked on the door and met Mr. Parris's brother, who told the officers to "check out" his brother. Officer Ponce asked Mr. Parris's brother if he really saw a gun. Mr. Parris's brother refused to answer the question and told the officers to go "check out" his brother. Officers Ponce and Wynne continued to speak to Mr. Parris's brother while Officers Jerry and Jones, who arrived shortly after them, went to speak

to Mr. Parris, who was in his bedroom; Mr. Parris told them nothing had happened. After speaking to Mr. Parris's brother for about 10 minutes, Officer Ponce said he conferred with the lieutenant who had arrived at the apartment, told them to write up a domestic incident report, and left. Officers Ponce and Wynne were about to write the report and leave the apartment when Mr. Parris's brother told them Mr. Parris had pointed a black gun at him.

Officer Ponce told OSI his intention at that point became to arrest Mr. Parris for Menacing, and potentially other charges. Officers Ponce and Wynne went to Mr. Parris's bedroom and knocked on the door. Mr. Parris opened it. Officer Ponce motioned for him to come out of the room, and Officer Wynne reached in and tried to grab Mr. Parris's arm. Officer Ponce said he saw Mr. Parris run to the back of the room, bend down, pick up a black gun from the couch area, and point the gun at him. Officer Ponce said he feared for his safety and the safety of his partners and unholstered his gun. He said he told Mr. Parris to "drop it," but Mr. Parris did not drop the gun. Officer Ponce said he fired multiple times until Mr. Parris fell to the floor and dropped the gun. Officer Ponce handcuffed Mr. Parris, and he and other officers administered CPR until EMS arrived and took over.

Police Officer James Wynne

Officer Wynne said he and Officer Ponce knocked on Mr. Parris's bedroom door after Mr. Parris's brother said Mr. Parris had pointed a gun at him. Mr. Parris opened the door, and they asked him to step out of the room. Officer Wynne said he grabbed Mr. Parris's arm to try to pull him out of the room and Mr. Parris ran to the back of the room. Officer Ponce went into the room while Officer Wynne stood just outside the door. Officer Wynne said he could not see into the room because Officer Ponce was in the doorway. Officer Wynne said he heard Officer Ponce say, "Drop it," and then heard multiple gunshots, but could not see the shooting.

Police Officer Tyliek Jerry

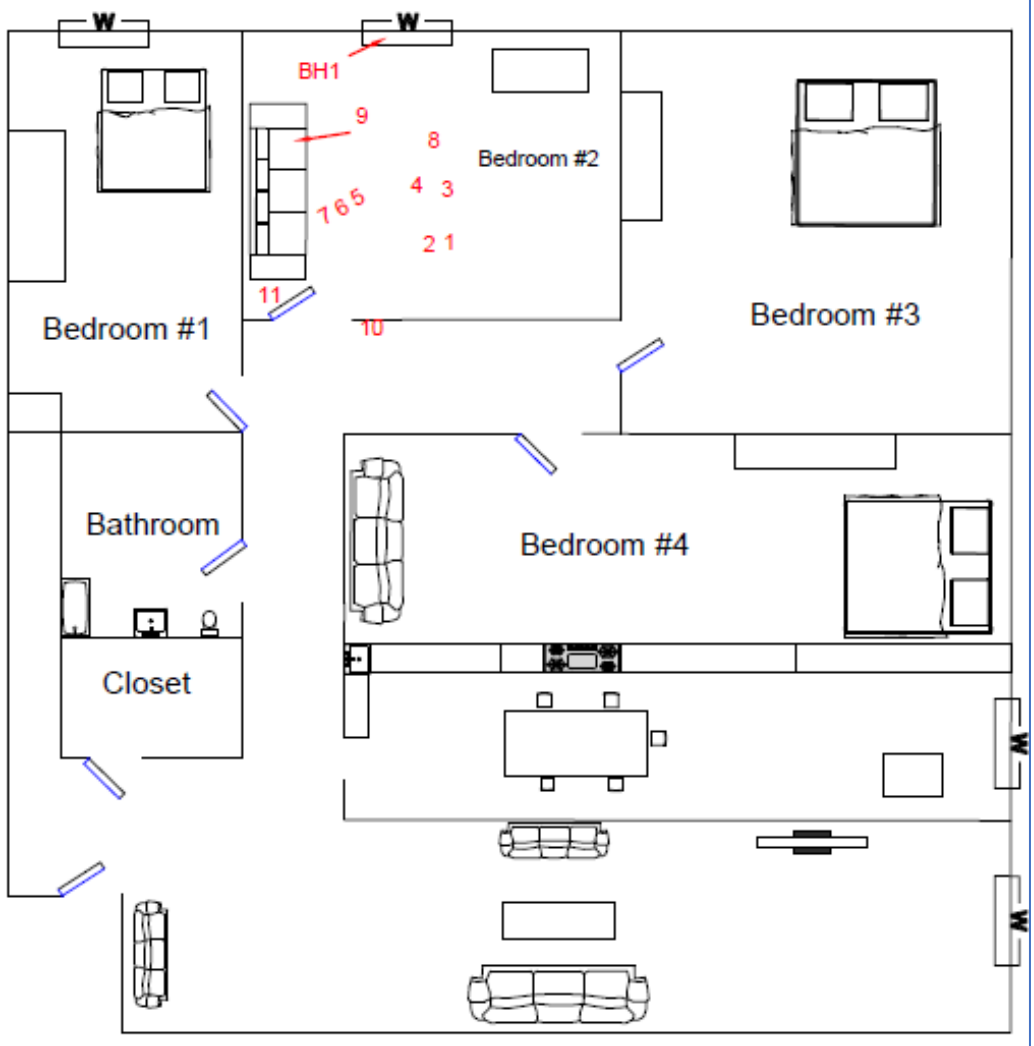
Officer Jerry said he was standing behind Officers Ponce and Wynne when they approached Mr. Parris's bedroom. Officer Jerry, being taller than Officers Ponce and Wynne, could see over them that the bedroom door opened, that Officer Wynne tried to grab Mr. Parris's arm, and that Mr. Parris ran to the back of the room and picked up a black gun from the floor. Officer Jerry said he took cover in a nearby room and heard multiple gunshots. Officer Jerry said he did not see the shooting. After the shooting, Officer Jerry said he entered Mr. Parris's bedroom and, while Officer Ponce administered CPR, picked up Mr. Parris's gun from the floor near the window area. Officer Jerry said he saw then that the gun was a BB gun.

Evidence Collection and Analysis

The NYPD Crime Scene Unit (CSU) recovered the BB gun, a deformed fired bullet, and five shell casings from Mr. Parris's room. CSU took possession of Officer Ponce's firearm, an NYPD-issued 9 mm Glock 17 pistol with a 15-round magazine, for a total capacity of 16 rounds, if one round is in the firing chamber. Upon examination, the gun had one round in the firing chamber and 10 rounds in the magazine, which is consistent with Officer Ponce having fired five shots, if the gun had been fully loaded.

CSU created the diagram below, showing where they recovered items in Mr. Parris's room, labeled "Bedroom # 2." The items labeled "D/S/C" were discharged shell casings.

NYPD CRIME SCENE UNIT
CSU RUN#24/61 02/12/2024
101 PCT DEPT. INVESTIGATION
[redacted]
PREPARED BY DET.SMITH #4482



EVIDENCE LEGEND:
1 - BB GUN
2 - NECKLACE
3 - SWEATPANTS
4 - PELLETS
5 - D/S/C
6 - D/S/C
7 - D/S/C
8 - DEFORMED FIRED BULLET
9 - C02 CARTRIDGE
10 - D/S/C
11 - D/S/C

ILLUSTRATION ONLY - NOT TO SCALE

Crime Scene Unit photograph of the recovered BB gun.

Autopsy

The autopsy of Mr. Parris was performed by Dr. Victor D. Sanchez of the Office of Chief Medical Examiner of the City of New York, who determined that the cause of Mr. Parris's death was "gunshot wounds of the torso and lower extremities," and deemed the manner of death to be "homicide (shot by police)." The autopsy found that Mr. Parris was struck by gunfire four times, to his torso and left knee.

LEGAL ANALYSIS

Article 35 of the New York Penal Law defines the circumstances under which a person may be justified in using deadly physical force against another. Justification is a defense, Penal Law Section (PL) 35.00, not an affirmative defense. To obtain a conviction at trial, a prosecutor must disprove a defense beyond a reasonable doubt, PL 25.00(1).

In its recent decision in *People v Jairo Castillo*, 42 NY3d 628, 631 (2024), the New York Court of Appeals stated:

> "The defense of justification provides that a person may use physical force to defend himself against an assailant's 'imminent use of unlawful physical force,' but does not authorize the use of 'deadly physical force . . . unless . . . [the person] reasonably believes that [the assailant] . . . is using or about to use deadly physical force' (Penal Law § 35.15). When considering a request for a justification charge, courts examine the evidence in the light most favorable to the defendant, and must provide the instruction if there is any reasonable view of the evidence that defendant was justified in his actions (see *People v Heiserman*, 39 NY3d 988, 990 [2022]). Justification has both a subjective requirement, that 'defendant . . . actually believed . . . he [was] . . . threatened with the imminent use of deadly physical force,' and an objective requirement, that defendant's 'reactions were . . . those of a reasonable man acting in self-defense' (*People v Collice*, 41 NY2d 906, 907 [1977])." (Square brackets and ellipses in the original.)

Deadly physical force is force that "under the circumstances in which it is used, attempted to be used or threatened to be used, is readily capable of causing death or other serious physical injury." PL 10.00(10).

A person does not have to wait to be attacked before using deadly physical force*. People v Valentin*, 29 NY3d 57, 60 (2017) ("He may…be the first to use deadly physical force so long as he reasonably believed it was about to be used against him").

Police officers attempting to make an arrest for an offense are not obligated to retreat before using deadly physical force in response to deadly physical force being used against themselves or another, even if they know they can do so in complete safety to themselves or others, PL 35.30 and PL 35.15(2)(a)(ii).

Based on the evidence in the investigation, when Officers Ponce and Wynne went to Mr. Parris's bedroom they had a reasonable belief that he had pointed a gun at his brother and was in possession of the gun, giving them reasonable cause to believe that Mr. Parris had committed the crime of Menacing and, possibly, Criminal Possession of a Firearm. Although the gun recovered in Mr. Parris's room was a BB gun, it appeared to be a real firearm, as shown in the photo above, and, in his interview with OSI, Officer Ponce said Mr. Parris pointed what appeared to be a black gun at him.

Therefore, OSI concludes that a prosecutor would not be able to disprove that Officer Ponce reasonably believed he saw Mr. Parris pointing a gun at him or that he reasonably believed he needed to use deadly physical force in self-defense. As a result, OSI will not seek charges against him, and closes the matter with the issuance of this report.

Dated: May 15, 2025