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On the afternoon of April 29, 2022, Jasonville Police Chief Ryan Van Horn was dispatched to the Stephen Scott Wheeler residence on Washington Street in Jasonville. The dispatch was made after a call was placed by a neighbor which alerted authorities that Wheeler was threatening citizens with a knife at this location.

As Chief Van Horn arrived near the Wheeler residence he spoke to individuals who confirmed that Wheeler was threatening people with a knife. Chief Van Horn then parked on the street outside Wheeler's home and exited his vehicle to speak with Wheeler, who at this time was sitting on his porch. Upon Chief Van Horn trying to speak with Wheeler, Wheeler exited his porch, armed with a knife, and began to aggressively approach Chief Van Horn who remained near his vehicle in the street.

As Wheeler approached, Chief Van Horn tried to de-escalate the situation by ordering Wheeler to drop the knife on 15 occasions, by offering help to Wheeler and finally by backing away from Wheeler. During the encounter Wheeler continuously yelled and cursed at Chief Van Horn, including telling Chief Van Horn that "I don't care, shoot me" and later stated that he doesn't care anymore and that he would shoot himself if he had a gun. Despite being ordered repeatedly to drop the knife, Wheeler continued to advance toward Chief Van Horn while raising and pointing the knife at him. Finally, Wheeler made it to Chief Van Horn's vehicle, where he again raised the knife and then charged at Chief Van Horn. Chief Van Horn took steps backward and then fired one shot that struck Wheeler from a distance of approximately 6 feet. Wheeler then stopped, turned around, walked back several steps where he then faced Chief Van Horn again and raised his knife. Wheeler then fell to the ground. Chief Van Horn then called for EMS and then began to provide assistance to Wheeler. Wheeler later died from the single gunshot wound to his chest.

An investigation of the incident was conducted by the Indiana State Police. The entire incident was recorded on Chief Van Horn's body worn camera. Interviews were also conducted with several citizens who witnessed some or all of the incident. Chief Van Horn was interviewed as well.

Under Indiana Code 35-41-3-2, a person is justified in using deadly force and does not have a duty to retreat if the person reasonably believes that the force is necessary to prevent serious bodily injury or death to the person or a third person. Further, under Indiana Code 35-41-3-3, a law enforcement officer is justified in using deadly force if the officer has probable cause to believe that deadly force is necessary to prevent the commission of a forcible felony or to effect an arrest of a person who the officer has probable cause to believe poses a threat of serious bodily

injury to the officer or a third person and the officer has given a warning, if feasible, to the person against whom the deadly force is to be used.

Stephen Wheeler was armed with a knife and threatening citizens in his neighborhood. Chief Van Horn arrived at Wheeler's location and tried peacefully to talk to Wheeler about what had occurred, but Wheeler refused. Instead, Wheeler aggressively approached Chief Van Horn and threatened him with a knife, refusing to drop it after being ordered to do so on 15 different occasions. Though it is impossible to be certain, the language and actions Wheeler chose that day were consistent with someone who sought suicide by cop. Eventually, Wheeler charged at Chief Van Horn while armed with the knife and left Chief Van Horn no choice but to shoot him in order to avoid being stabbed. Under Indiana law, Chief Van Horn was justified in using deadly force in order to protect himself from serious bodily injury or death. His actions also served to protect others in the immediate area as well.



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