



Second Judicial District

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Decision Letter

March 7, 2003

Contact: Lynn Kimbrough, 720-913-9025

Gerald Whitman
Chief of Police
Denver Police Department
1331 Cherokee Street
Denver, CO 80204

.RE: Investigation of the shooting death of
Anthony Ray Jefferson, DOB 1/13/82, DPD
#496394, by Officer John Super, 80043, on
November 7, 2002, in the 4100 block of East
Bruce Randolph Avenue, Denver, Colorado.

Dear Chief Whitman:

The investigation and legal analysis of the shooting of Anthony Ray Jefferson have been completed, and I conclude that under applicable Colorado law no criminal charges are fileable against Officer John Super. My decision, based on criminal-law standards, does not limit administrative action by the Denver Police Department where non-criminal issues can be reviewed and redressed, or civil actions where less-stringent laws, rules and legal levels of proof apply. A description of the procedure used in the investigation of this shooting by a peace officer and the applicable Colorado law is attached to this letter. The complete file of the investigation is open to the public at our office, and any interested party is welcome to review the investigation and my decision in greater detail.

SYNOPSIS

At approximately 10:45 a.m., on Thursday, November 7, 2002, uniformed Denver police officer Kurt Peterson ("Officer Peterson"), 87020, made a traffic stop on a red Toyota Camry. The Camry was traveling westbound on East Bruce Randolph Avenue. The driver stopped in the 4100 block when Officer Peterson activated the over-head lights of his marked-police car. Peterson got out of his car and approached the Camry, which was occupied by two men. He asked the driver, Lajuan Simmons, 5/9/77, DPD # 474696 ("Simmons"), for his driver's license and the vehicle registration. Simmons told him that he did not have a license and gave Officer Peterson the name "Lajuan Robinson." Officer Peterson then asked the passenger for his name and the passenger identified himself as "Cora Fite." Officer Peterson stepped back to his patrol car to check his on-board computer for the names given. While Officer Peterson was checking the names, Officer John Super ("Officer Super"), also driving a marked-patrol car, drove by. Officer Peterson got on his police radio and requested Officer Super drive back and give him some cover and assistance.

Officer Peterson returned to the Camry and asked Simmons to step out of the car. Simmons complied. Officer Peterson frisked Simmons for weapons and then asked him to sit on the north curb between his car and Officer Peterson's patrol car. Simmons did so. Officer Peterson then approached the passenger side of the vehicle and began asking the passenger to step out. The passenger, later identified as Anthony Ray Jefferson, 1/13/82, DPD #496394 ("Jefferson"), first refused and then reached into a pocket where he had concealed a handgun. Officer Peterson yelled at Jefferson to show his hands and quickly reached for or into the car. Jefferson fired his handgun through his pocket and the bullet struck Officer Peterson in the face. Officer Peterson stepped or was knocked backward and fell to the ground. When Officer Peterson approached the passenger's side of the Camry to speak with Jefferson, Officer Super took a position next to the right rear window of the Camry in order to cover Officer Peterson. When Officer Super heard the shot and saw Officer Peterson fall, he drew his own service pistol and fired numerous times at Jefferson. Jefferson was shot in the head, left hand and left leg. After Officer Super determined that Jefferson was no longer a threat, he advised the police dispatcher that an officer had been shot and that an assailant had been shot. Paramedics responded and determined that Jefferson was dead at the scene. Officer Peterson was taken to Denver Health Medical Center and treated for a gunshot wound to the face.

STATEMENT OF INVESTIGATION

This investigation involves the shooting death of Anthony Ray Jefferson by Denver Police Officer John Super, 80043, who was on-duty and in uniform. Officer Super was providing cover to uniformed Denver Police Officer Kurt Peterson, 87020, who was engaged in a “routine-traffic stop.” When the passenger in the car, Jefferson, shot Officer Peterson in the face, Officer Super returned fire—striking Jefferson multiple times in the head and body. Jefferson died at the scene. Officer Super then immediately requested an ambulance and advised the police dispatcher that he had been in an officer-involved shooting. Computer aided dispatcher (“CAD”) records show that Officer Peterson alerted the dispatcher that he was making a traffic stop at 10:45 a.m. The CAD records show that Officer Super made the “officer-down” call and requested “CODE—10 cover at 10:48 a.m.

Denver paramedics and firefighters at the scene treated Officer Peterson and attempted to treat Jefferson. They quickly realized that Jefferson’s injuries were severe and that he displayed no pulse or other signs of life. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

Officer Peterson was transported to Denver Health Medical Center where he was admitted in “critical” condition. He had been shot in the left jaw and cheek. The bullet fractured at least one bone and caused major damage. Dr. Ernest Moore completed a “Serious Bodily Injury” form, noting that Officer Peterson was suffering from broken bones and that the injuries constituted a “substantial risk of death, a substantial risk of serious, permanent disfigurement, and a substantial risk of protracted loss or impairment of the function of a part or organ of the body.”

Officers Peterson and Super were both dressed in full blue Denver police uniforms. They were both driving marked police cars and, when investigators arrived at the scene, Officer Peterson’s emergency lights were still operating. Officer Super was armed with a model 659 Smith & Wesson, 9mm semi-automatic pistol. This weapon has a magazine capacity of fourteen rounds and may be carried with an additional round in the chamber. At the time of the incident, Officer Super’s weapon was fully loaded with DPD-issued ammunition. Following the incident and in compliance with the protocols established for officer-involved shootings, Officer Super’s weapon was given to Denver police crime lab personnel for appropriate testing.

Investigators found Jefferson’s body seated in the front-passenger’s seat of the Toyota Camry. The muzzle of a handgun protruded through a hole in a pocket on the right side of his jacket. This weapon was recovered and examined by Denver police firearms examiners. The weapon was found to be a model 36 Smith & Wesson, .38-caliber revolver. This weapon has a five round cylinder capacity. Firearm examiners test fired the weapon and determined that it would “fire single and double action.” When recovered, the weapon had two live rounds and three spent-shell casings in the cylinder. When Jefferson’s clothing was examined at the commencement of the autopsy at the morgue, a red bandana was found in Jefferson’s jacket pocket. In this bandana were nine live .38 caliber cartridges. The bullet that struck Officer Peterson fragmented in his face and head. Doctors were unable to remove most of the fragments and that bullet was, thus, unavailable for testing and comparison purposes.

Officer Peterson was armed with a model P220 Sig Sauer, .45 caliber semi-automatic pistol. This weapon has a seven round magazine capacity and may be carried with an additional round in the chamber. At Denver Health Medical Center, Peterson's gun belt and clothing were recovered. His weapon was in his gun-belt holster and it was in a fully-loaded condition. Officer Peterson did not fire his weapon.

On November 8, 2002, Dr. Thomas Henry, Chief Medical Examiner for the City and County of Denver, conducted an autopsy on Jefferson's body. Dr. Henry detailed four gun-shot wounds to the head. One bullet entered on the right side of Jefferson's head, near the top ("the right superior parietal region . . . 5.5 cm to the right of the midline and 2.5 cm below the top of the head.) The path of the bullet was determined to be "right to left, slightly from back to front, and downward. It fractured the skull and passed through the brain. This bullet was recovered at autopsy. Another bullet struck Jefferson "just behind and above the right ear." This bullet also fractured the skull and passed through the brain. Its track was determined to be "back to front, right to left, and downward." This bullet was also recovered at autopsy. Either one of these wounds would have been fatal. Another entrance wound was found "just in front of the right ear." The bullet passed through the skin and subcutaneous tissue of the right cheek and exited near the right side of the nose. The path was determined to be "back to front, slightly from right to left, and slightly downward." The fourth gun-shot wound to the head struck Jefferson's right jaw. The bullet passed through the skin and subcutaneous tissue and fractured the mandible. It exited "over" the chin. Its path was determined to be "back to front, slightly from right to left and slightly downward."

Dr. Henry also documented several gunshot wounds to Jefferson's body. These included a graze wound to the left shoulder, a wound to the left hand that entered at the back of the left ring finger and exited at the back of the left hand, and five separate wounds to the left thigh. Three of these bullets struck and fractured the left femur. Each one of these three was removed from Jefferson's body at autopsy. The other two passed through the leg and were not recovered at autopsy. Toxicological screens were negative for ethanol, opiates, stimulants and cocaine or cocaine metabolites. The test for THC – the active psychotropic ingredient in marijuana – was positive for the presence of THC. The cause of death was determined to be multiple-gunshot wounds.

The spent slugs removed from Jefferson's body were delivered to the Denver Police Department's crime laboratory for examination. When Dr. Henry was removing Jefferson's clothing, a spent bullet fell from his left-pant leg. This projectile was also delivered to the crime lab for examination. On November 11, 2002, Denver-police investigators searched the Camry which had been moved to an impound cage. They recovered a spent bullet from the passenger side door pillar, another from inside the front passenger door, and another from beneath the right front floor carpet. A partial bullet was found in the glove box. These projectiles were also delivered to the crime lab for examination. At the scene, investigators recovered ten spent shell casings. These, also, were delivered to the crime lab for examination. The bullet recovered from inside the Camry door and the bullet found beneath the floor carpet were identified to Officer Super's pistol. The bullet removed from the door pillar was "consistent in class characteristics" to Officer Super's firearm, but was too damaged for further comparison purposes. The bullet removed from the Camry glove box was "consistent with being a copper-jacketed bullet," but

had no further comparative value. The examiners were able to identify one of the bullets removed from Jefferson's brain and the bullet that fell out of his pant leg to Officer Super's firearm. The other bullet which passed through the brain and the bullets removed from his left leg were either "consistent in class characteristics" to Officer Super's weapon, but too damaged for identification purposes, or "consistent with being copper-jacketed bullets," but having no further comparison value.

There were several residents and individuals at work in the neighborhood. Three witnesses, Carlos Gallegos, 5/17/81, Joyce Madrid, 3/1/64, and Manuel Montoya, 9-29-76, told police investigators that they had each seen at least part of the initial-traffic stop. Each stated that it appeared to be a "routine-traffic stop" and they paid little attention. None of these three saw the actual shooting. Several of the other witnesses told investigators that they heard shots and saw the aftermath of the shooting. Written statements were obtained from all of these witnesses. Video-taped statements were obtained from two individuals who were in a building across the street from the shooting scene and looked out of the window when they heard the gunshots. These citizens were: Lashonn Billingsley, 10/5/69, and Janet Nelson, 9/9/61. These two witnesses saw the immediate aftermath, but did not see either Jefferson or Officer Super fire a weapon.

At the time of the incident, Simmons was seated directly on the sidewalk behind his car. He was taken into custody after Officer Super called for assistance. Simmons agreed to speak with investigators and did so in two video-taped interviews. In accordance with protocol, Officer Super was separated from the other witnesses and taken to Denver Police Headquarters by an un-involved supervisor. At headquarters, he gave a video-taped statement concerning his role in the incident. Officer Peterson was too badly injured to be interviewed on the day of the shooting. On November 20, 2002, police investigators met with Officer Peterson at Denver Police Headquarters and he provided a video-taped statement.

There is no dispute regarding the facts surrounding the events that led up to the shooting and wounding of Officer Peterson by Jefferson, and the shooting which resulted in Jefferson's death. While Simmons and Officers Peterson and Super were the only persons present during and witness to the entire incident, their statements are extremely corroborative of one another and provide a remarkably clear picture of the events. It is from these statements that we determine the following account.

On the morning of November 7, 2002, Simmons and Jefferson decided to go to a McDonald's restaurant on Colorado Boulevard. They left from a residence at 3333 Dahlia Street in a car that Simmons had borrowed from an uncle. They drove out the alley between Dahlia and Dexter. Simmons, who was driving, made a left turn onto 34th Avenue. As they drove westbound on 34th Avenue, Simmons noted a police car proceeding in the other direction. He then saw the police car make a u-turn. The officer then drove up behind them and activated the overhead lights. In Simmons words, the officer "turned on his emergency lights – I pulled over."

Officer Peterson, assigned as a Neighborhood Police Officer (NPO), told investigators that the District Two NPO's had received a number of complaints about suspected gang activity at an apartment complex in the 3300 block of Dahlia Street. He was the officer that Simmons

saw make the u-turn. He told investigators that he had seen a car driving “at a fairly high rate of speed coming out of the alley in the 3300 block of Dahlia-Dexter.” When the car failed to stop at the mouth of the alley and failed to signal the turn, Officer Peterson decided to make the traffic stop. His purpose was two-fold: to address the traffic violations and to see if he could gain some more intelligence on the gang problem at the apartment complex.

The traffic stop was initially routine in nature. Officer Peterson got out of his car, approached the Camry on the driver’s side and asked Simmons for his license, registration and proof of insurance. Simmons replied that he did not have a license, but that the car belonged to his uncle and he had permission to drive it. Officer Peterson then asked Jefferson, sitting in the passenger’s seat, for identification so that, if he determined it was appropriate, he would be able to release the vehicle to a licensed driver. Simmons told Officer Peterson his name was “Lajuan Robinson.” He did so, he later told investigators, because he was concerned about receiving a ticket for driving without a license. Simmons also heard Jefferson give Officer Peterson the name “Karo Fites or something like that.” Officer Peterson recalled that Jefferson provided him with the name “Cilo Fite.” Simmons told investigators that it seemed like a normal traffic stop; neither he nor Officer Peterson was upset or particularly concerned. In Simmons words:

“it wasn’t no tension, it wasn’t no aggression, he’s [Officer Peterson} doing his job, I’m telling him what he needs to know, he goes back, checks the computer, see if I got some warrants . . . I wasn’t trippin’ about nothing.”

As Simmons noted, Officer Peterson returned to his patrol car to verify the information he had been provided on his mobile data terminal (“MDT”). He stated that the information he received indicated “no record found [no Colorado I.D]” on either party, but there was a “parole hit” on the name the driver had provided. Officer Peterson became concerned that both Simmons and Jefferson had provided him with false names.

As Officer Peterson was reviewing the information on the MDT, he observed Officer Super pull up to the intersection to the west of Officer Peterson. It appeared to him that Officer Super was doing some paperwork. Officer Super then pulled away and drove past Officer Peterson en route to another call. Officer Peterson told investigators that he got on his radio and asked Officer Super if he could return to the scene and give him some cover as he suspected that, at the very least, the passenger had given him false identification. Officer Peterson saw Officer Super pull up behind him. Officer Peterson got out of his patrol car, approached the driver, told him of his concerns, and asked him to step out of the vehicle. He spoke briefly with the driver and then asked him to take a seat at the curb behind the Camry.

Officer Super confirmed that he had stopped around the corner when he saw Officer Peterson make the traffic stop. He then received another call from the radio dispatcher and started to drive off. He had driven eastbound on 34th and was about ½ a block past Officer Peterson when he heard Officer Peterson on the radio requesting that he return. He recalled that Officer Peterson said, “I think this guy is lying to me.” Officer Super turned around and parked behind Officer Peterson’s police car.

Simmons told investigators that Officer Peterson returned to his car and asked him to

verify his name. He then asked him to get out of the car and he did so. Officer Peterson “patted” him down and asked him if there were any warrants outstanding for him. He replied that he was not wanted, but that he had recently been released from the Colorado State Penitentiary. Officer Peterson asked him to sit on the curb between his car and the police car. Simmons then saw Officer Peterson approach the passenger side of the Camry. Simmons stated that he saw Officer Peterson open the passenger door and ask “SS” to step out of the car. He saw Jefferson turn somewhat and he then heard Officer Peterson say “take your hand out of your pocket!” He saw Officer Peterson lean forward and reach into the car and he then heard gunshots: “It seems like as soon as [Officer Peterson] reached for [Jefferson], gunshots . . . the gun went off.” When Simmons heard gunshots, he “turned around lay down on the ground . . . lay flat on my stomach with my hands up to show that I didn’t have anything.”

Officer Peterson corroborates Simmons observations. He stated that after he asked Simmons to take a seat at the curb, he approached Jefferson. As he did so, he saw Officer Super take a position slightly behind the driver and to the right of the passenger’s side door in a position that allowed him to cover Officer Peterson as he made the contact. Using a normal, “conversational tone of voice,” Officer Peterson asked Jefferson to step out of the vehicle. Jefferson said nothing, looked down at his lap and “wouldn’t make eye-contact.” Officer Peterson repeated his request, and when he got no response, he “reached over and opened the passenger door.” When he did so he saw that Jefferson was holding his right hand concealed in his jacket pocket. Officer Peterson told investigators that he said to Jefferson, “let me see your hands, and he just ducked his head lower and his hand started going deeper in his pocket.” Officer Peterson now became concerned that Jefferson was holding some type of contraband and he repeated his request in a louder tone of voice. Officer Peterson recalls that he stepped forward and leaned into the Camry in an attempt to control Jefferson’s hands and “at that point the lights went out.” Officer Peterson told investigators that his next conscious realization was that he was on the ground and Officer Super was firing into the vehicle.

When Officer Super got out of his police car, he took a position to the north of the passenger’s side of the Camry, so that he could watch the passenger and keep an eye on Simmons, who was seated on the curb. From his position, he saw Officer Peterson approach the passenger side of the car and ask Jefferson to step out of the car. He then heard Officer Peterson say “just take your hand out of your pocket, real slow.” At this time, neither officer had drawn his service pistol. Officer Super stated that Officer Peterson repeated his command and this time “there was some panic in his voice.” Officer Super then saw Officer Peterson reach down: “I remember I [saw] his left hand down. He reaches down and he’s gonna hold it, like you know, we’ve been taught. . . you hold that [an adversary’s weapon] in your hand. Hold it, uh, [Jefferson’s] right hand in his pocket. And now I know something is wrong. And the guy kinda rolls and ‘boom.’ The shot goes off.” Officer Super saw Officer Peterson fall away and he realized that Jefferson had shot Officer Peterson. He immediately drew his service pistol and began firing into the car. He continued firing until he saw Jefferson stop moving.

The sound of gunfire attracted the attention of Janet Nelson and Lashonn Billingsly, both of whom were working at a daycare center on the southwest corner of 34th Avenue and Albion Street. Ms. Nelson stated that she looked out of a window on the north side of the building and “saw the officer shoot inside a red vehicle about five times and then I saw an officer crawl away

from the car with his hand on his face with blood streaming.” She stated that when the shots stopped, the officer who had been firing his gun “grabbed his [police radio] which was on his shoulder and kept his gun trained on the car.” Ms. Billingsly stated that she heard a co-worker say that someone was shooting. She, too, looked out the window and saw

“a police officer standing over the car and he was shooting into the car. I probably saw about one or two shots that he fired in the car and then he didn’t shoot anymore, he was just standing there holding his gun over the... directed towards the car. Then I saw another officer holding his face and he was rolling on the ground and I could see that he had been shot in the face.”

Ms. Billingsly added, that after the officer ceased firing, she saw him glance to his left several times as if he was trying to keep his eye on something or someone. However, from her position, she was unable to see at whom or what he was looking.

Super told investigators that he fired “because [Jefferson] had shot Kurt [Peterson] and then I figured I was next.” Immediately after Officer Super stopped firing and confirmed that Simmons posed no additional threat, he called for an ambulance and the appropriate cover officers.

LEGAL ANALYSIS

Criminal liability is established in Colorado only if it is proved beyond a reasonable doubt that someone has committed all of the elements of an offense defined by Colorado statute, and it is proved beyond a reasonable doubt that the offense was committed without any statutorily-recognized justification or excuse. While knowingly or intentionally shooting another human being and causing their death is generally prohibited as homicide in Colorado, the Criminal Code specifies certain circumstances in which the use of deadly physical force is justified. As the evidence establishes that Officer Super shot Jefferson the determination whether his conduct was criminal is primarily a question of legal justification.

Section 18-1-707(2) of the Colorado Revised Statutes defines the circumstances under which a peace officer can use deadly physical force in Colorado. In pertinent part, the statute reads as follows:

- (2) A peace officer is **justified** in using deadly physical force upon another person ... only when he reasonably believes that it is necessary:
- (a) **To defend** himself or a third person from what he reasonably believes to be the use or imminent use of deadly physical force; or
 - (b) **To effect the arrest or to prevent the escape** from custody of a person whom he reasonably believes:
 - 1. Has committed or attempted to commit a felony involving the use or threatened use of a deadly weapon; or
 - 2. Is attempting to escape by the use of a deadly weapon.

Section 18-1-901(2)(e) of the Colorado Revised Statutes defines the term “Deadly

weapon” as follows:

(2)(e) “**Deadly Weapon**” means any of the following which in the manner it is used or intended to be used is capable of producing death or serious bodily injury: (I) **A firearm**, whether loaded or unloaded; (II) A knife; (III) A bludgeon; or (IV) Any other weapon, device, instrument, material, or substance, whether animate or inanimate.

Also pertinent to the facts and circumstances of this case is Section 18-3-202 (1)(e), Assault in the first degree, of the Colorado Revised Statutes, which reads as follows:

- (1) A person commits the crime of assault in the first degree if:
 - (e) With intent to cause serious bodily injury upon the person of a peace officer or firefighter, he or she threatens with a deadly weapon a peace officer or firefighter engaged in the performance of his or her duties, and the offender knows or reasonably should know that the victim is a peace officer or firefighter acting in the performance of his or her duties.

In reference to the pertinent section of the “Assault in the first degree” statute in which the victim is a peace officer, in *People v. Prante*, 177 Colo. 243, 493 P.2d 1083 (1972), the Colorado Supreme Court stated:

“The General Assembly recognizes that peace officers are placed in a position of great risk and responsibility, so to invoke a special punishment for an assault upon a peace officer acting in the scope of his official duties is neither arbitrary, capricious, nor unreasonable.”

Therefore, the question presented in this case is whether, at the instant Officer Super fired the shots that killed Jefferson, he reasonably believed that Jefferson was or was about to direct deadly physical force against him or another person or was attempting to escape by the use of a deadly weapon. In order to establish criminal responsibility for an officer knowingly or intentionally causing the death of another, the state must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the officer doing the shooting either did not really believe in the existence of these requisite circumstances, or, if he did hold such belief, that belief was, in light of all available facts, unreasonable.

CONCLUSION

Based on the totality of the facts developed in this investigation, as summarized in this letter, there is no reasonable likelihood of proving beyond a reasonable doubt that Officer John Super committed any criminal act. To the contrary, the only criminal conduct involved here was that of Jefferson shooting Officer Peterson in the face. Officer Super immediately returned fire. Jefferson suffered multiple gun-shot wounds to the head and body and died at the scene. Officer Super’s use of deadly physical force was clearly necessary and justified. It is fortunate that Officer Peterson survived the devastating bullet wound he suffered and that Officer Super was present to protect him. Therefore, I conclude that under applicable Colorado law no

criminal charges are fileable against the officer in the shooting death of Anthony Ray Jefferson

As in every case we handle, any interested party may seek judicial review of our decision under C.R.S. 16-5-209.

[1] Four small baggies of suspected marijuana were found in another one of his coat pockets.

[2] A copy of a body diagram displaying the placement of the wounds to the torso is attached hereto as appendix 1.

[3] Witnesses, Carlos Gallegos, 5/17/81, and Manuel Montoya, 9/29/76, provided written statements in which they stated that they drove by and saw what appeared to be a routine traffic stop. Montoya wrote:

"I saw a cop had pulled a car over. It looked like a normal traffic stop. The cop looked like he went to the car and got info and went back to the cop car. I saw another cop car at Albion [Street]. We got out of the truck and went to the bank."

Gallegos wrote:

"We saw another cop had a car pulled over, it looked like a routine traffic stop. At that time the 2nd cop pulled around the other cop and at that time the 1st cop exited his vehicle and came up on the driver side and the guy in the driver side began to get out. He opened the door and that's all I saw because I turned up the alley to go to the bank."

[4] Simmons, at first, told investigators that he knew Jefferson only as "SS," which he, at first, claimed was an abbreviation for "Short Stop." He ultimately admitted that he knew the full name Anthony Jefferson and, further, that "SS" was also an abbreviation for "Stay Strapped" or "Stay Strap." He agreed that "strap" was a slang term for gun. Although Simmons admitted he was aware that Jefferson had a reputation for carrying a weapon, he was adamant that he did not know Jefferson was armed, nor did he anticipate that Jefferson was going to assault Officer Peterson. He told investigators:

"He didn't say shit to me when we was in the car [waiting for Officer Peterson to return]. He was being fucking quiet. I don't know what was going through his mind, I don't know what he was thinking . . . that's why I was so fucking shocked, that's why I fucking jumped when the shit went down, because he didn't make no kind of indications that the shit was going to happen like that, know what I'm saying, I'm thinking it's just a fucking ticket . . ."

(It is also worth noting that, at autopsy, Dr. Henry noted the tattoo "Stay Strapped" on the upper left chest.)

Very truly yours

Original Hard Copy is signed

Bill Ritter, Jr.
District Attorney