

ASIRT DECISION

**IN THE MATTER OF A POLICE DOG BITE IN CALGARY
ON FEBRUARY 12, 2025**

Acting Executive Director: Matthew Block

File No.: 2025-0004(S)

Date of Release: May 20, 2026

Introduction

On February 13, 2025, pursuant to s. 46.1 of the *Police Act*, the Director of Law Enforcement directed the Alberta Serious Incident Response Team (ASIRT) to investigate an incident involving a police service dog (PSD) with the Calgary Police Service (CPS) biting a child during the pursuit of a suspect who fled from police. ASIRT designated one subject officer and provided him with notice. ASIRT's investigation is now complete.

ASIRT's Investigation

ASIRT's investigation was comprehensive and thorough, conducted using current investigative protocols, and in accordance with the principles of major case management.

ASIRT investigators interviewed the affected person (AP) and reviewed her medical records related to this incident. They also interviewed one additional civilian witness, civilian witness #1 (CW1).

ASIRT investigators also interviewed two police witnesses, including the subject officer (SO) and witness officer #1 (WO1). They also obtained the reports and/or notes from four additional police witnesses. All witness officers arrived after the PSD engaged with the AP.

ASIRT investigators reviewed all available video of the incident, including video from four police vehicles (WatchGuard system is equipped with forward-facing and rear-facing cameras), body worn camera (BWC) footage from four officers, and video footage taken by the CPS Helicopter Air Watch for Community Safety (HAWCS).

ASIRT investigators also reviewed the CPS policies and training standards relating to the canine unit as well as the SO's training records.

ASIRT investigators also conducted a scene examination.

Circumstances Surrounding the Incident

On February 12, 2025, at approximately 3 p.m. CPS officers attempted a traffic stop on a suspected stolen vehicle. The vehicle fled and ground units did not pursue. HAWCS maintained continuity of the vehicle and observed as it entered a subdivision and stopped. The male driver fled on foot. The SO deployed his PSD off leash and ran after him. The PSD pursued the suspect into the backyard of a residence. Although the suspect ran across the backyard to the other side of the residence, the PSD continued straight through the backyard, through an opening in the back fence, across an alley, and into a greenspace, where the nine-year-old AP and her friend were present. HAWCS advised the SO and other officers on the ground of this development.

The PSD initially ran past the AP. The AP then began running away in the opposite direction. The PSD turned around and ran after the AP. The PSD jumped on the AP, and bit her backpack and hair. The AP fell to the ground and the PSD bit her leg. As the SO ran from the backyard towards the greenspace, he shouted commands at the PSD. It was not until the SO entered the greenspace that the PSD released the AP and the SO was able to gain physical control of his canine.

Emergency Medical Services (EMS) were contacted immediately and transported the AP to the hospital. The AP sustained multiple lacerations to her right leg as a result of the dog bite, as well as a wound to the top of her forehead and other superficial facial abrasions.

Affected Person (AP)

ASIRT investigators interviewed the AP the day after the incident.

The AP advised that she had been playing at the park with her friends before beginning to walk home with CW1. While walking, a dog wearing a vest came out of CW1's backyard and ran toward her. She ran away but fell to the ground, at which point the dog pounced on her and bit her hair and leg. She heard police officers calling the dog; however, it did not immediately disengage. One officer intervened and pulled the police dog away from the AP by its vest. A second officer then lifted the AP and carried her to a nearby police vehicle, where her injuries were examined. Upon the arrival of EMS, officers assisted the AP to the ambulance, and she was transported to hospital.

The AP further advised that she did not hear or observe anything prior to the dog exiting CW1's backyard and she did not see anyone else in the area at the time. She also noted that on the morning of the interview, while her mother was brushing her hair, she had observed that a small clump of hair was missing from the back of the AP's head.

AP's Medical Records

The AP's medical records were obtained by ASIRT investigators pursuant to a consent release signed by the AP's parent.

The medical records confirmed that the AP attended the Alberta Children's Hospital on February 12, 2025. She sustained three large puncture wounds to the top of her right thigh, one of which extended deep to the muscle. She also sustained two puncture wounds to the underside of her thigh, an abrasion to her right shin, an abrasion on her left cheek, and a cut at her hairline. The wounds to her leg were attributed to the dog bite and the other facial injuries were attributed to having fallen on the snow. The AP was sedated for the purpose of wound cleaning and suturing and then discharged with prescribed antibiotics.

Civilian Witness #1 (CW1)

ASIRT investigators interviewed CW1, the AP's nine-year old friend.

CW1 said that he had been playing at the park with his best friend, the AP, after school. They then began walking back towards his house. They had almost reached his backyard when a dog ran towards them. CW1 was scared and moved to the side. The AP began running away and the dog then chased her and jumped at her. The AP fell to the ground. The dog bit the AP on the back of her neck and her leg.

Two police officers ran out of CW1's backyard and towards them. CW1 could hear the police shouting, "no, no, no" at the dog. One of the officers, believed to be the SO, grabbed the dog and the second officer, believed to be WO1, carried the AP away. The AP was screaming and crying. Apart from the police officers and a helicopter that kept circling overhead, CW1 had not seen anyone else in the immediate area at the time they observed the dog.

Subject Officer (SO)

The SO submitted to an interview with ASIRT notwithstanding his entitlement to rely on his right to silence. He provided a full account of the incident, with the below areas being particularly relevant to ASIRT's investigation.

The SO confirmed that he has been a member of the CPS Canine Unit for approximately 10 years, and that he had been partnered with his PSD for the past four or five years. He noted that his dog is an experienced PSD. He maintained control of his PSD through obedience training, including verbal commands, an electronic collar, and physical control.

On February 12, 2025, the SO was responding to a call for service in respect of a stolen vehicle that had fled from police and been driven dangerously. He noted that it was standard for a CPS canine member to respond to these high-risk calls as the PSD could be deployed if the offender fled from the vehicle. He heard HAWCS advise that the vehicle had stopped in a residential neighbourhood and that the driver, wearing a high-visibility reflective vest, had exited the vehicle and fled.

Upon arrival, the SO removed his PSD from the police vehicle by holding him by the large handle on his harness. He heard HAWCS advising that the offender was running down a nearby alley and through some yards. The SO and his PSD began moving towards the anticipated direction of the offender. The SO observed the offender running and did not see any other civilians in the immediate area. He estimated that he was approximately 60 feet away from the offender at this time. The SO believed that his PSD was "locked on" to the offender and was confident that from that distance, his PSD would apprehend the offender along the side of the house he was running towards or in the backyard. He, therefore, released his PSD as he believed it was the quickest and safest way to apprehend the offender. The SO then followed behind his PSD.

The SO described that there are several variables which are considered when determining whether to deploy the PSD on or off leash, and many are dependent on the experience of the dog handler and the PSD. He was not alerted to any other risks or dangers in the area that may have impacted his assessment, such as the open gate in the backyard and the fact that the residences backed onto a school yard.

The SO could not see his PSD or the offender as he ran to the side of the house and into the backyard. He had expected to hear the offender struggling with the PSD or screaming because of the contact made by the PSD and was surprised when he didn't. He then observed an open gate at the back of the yard and heard HAWCS transmit over the radio that his PSD was in a field with some children. He ran from the backyard into the back alley and observed his PSD and two small children.

He saw his PSD run past the AP, who then stopped. The SO immediately began recalling his PSD using verbal commands. At this point, the AP turned around and began running in front of the PSD. His PSD then chased the AP and pushed her down. He bit her backpack and leg.

The SO began triggering the PSD's electronic collar in addition to the verbal commands, which caused the PSD to move away from the AP. The SO estimated that he was between 30 – 60 feet away from his PSD when the dog was successfully recalled. The SO then gained physical control of his PSD and directed other officers to provide the AP with medical aid.

The SO did not believe there were any external factors that negatively impacted his communication with his PSD during the incident. He noted, however, that PSDs are trained to treat running offenders as non-compliant and it was possible that the AP running in front of him was interpreted as such, and may be why he pursued the AP notwithstanding the SO's efforts to recall him. The SO believed that his PSD did not apprehend the offender as he was already out of sight, or around the corner of the house, when the PSD arrived in the backyard.

The SO was asked directly about the fact that he was observed limping on the available video footage. The SO attributed his limp to requiring a knee replacement. He maintained that he does not believe that his injured knee impacted on his ability to perform his job or to keep up with his dog on this date. He advised that he had completed a physical fitness test when he entered the canine unit; however, had not been asked to complete one since.

With respect to his training, the SO advised that once admitted to the Canine Unit, he completed a six-to-eight-month basic handler course. Each time he was teamed up with a new PSD, which in his case was twice, he was also required to complete an abridged basic handler course. He estimated that he had completed approximately 18 months of training. Additionally, they are required to annually recertify with their PSD, and together they had passed their most recent recertification without issue in December 2024.

Witness Officer

ASIRT investigators interviewed WO1.

WO1 advised that at approximately 3 p.m. on this date, he conducted a traffic stop on a stolen vehicle. The vehicle fled, and WO1 did not pursue as HAWCS took over aerial surveillance. HAWCS subsequently provided ongoing updates regarding the vehicle's location and the activities of its occupants. When HAWCS advised that the driver of the stolen vehicle had fled on foot, the SO and his PSD initiated a foot track. WO1 followed behind the SO to provide cover; however, the SO was a significant distance ahead of him.

WO1 then heard the SO yelling and a girl screaming. Upon catching up to the SO, WO1 observed the PSD holding the AP on the ground. The SO immediately disengaged the PSD from the AP. WO1 observed the PSD jump up to the SO as he approached. WO1 then attended to the AP and observed puncture wounds to her leg, which were bleeding. The AP stated that she was unable to walk. As a result, WO1 carried her to a police vehicle, where she awaited the arrival of an ambulance. While being assisted, the AP stated to WO1, "this is why I hate dogs."

Video Evidence

ASIRT investigators reviewed the WatchGuard videos from four police vehicles operated by the SO, WO1, and two additional officers. They also reviewed the BWC footage from the SO, WO1, and two additional officers, along with video footage from HAWCS. Below is a summary of what could be seen and heard during the police response on this date following a review of all available footage.

An initial traffic stop was initiated on the suspected stolen vehicle at 3:02 p.m. The vehicle fled from police at a high rate of speed, and ground units disengaged from the pursuit immediately as HAWCS was already overhead. HAWCS maintained continuity of the stolen vehicle. The vehicle stopped in a residential area at 3:07 p.m. where the driver, dressed in an orange high-visibility jumpsuit, and another occupant exited and separately walked away down the back alley of some residences.

The SO arrived and deployed his PSD at 3:08 p.m. Holding the top of the PSD's harness while it was off leash, they walked towards the back alley where the driver had last been seen. Someone yelling, "stop!" can be heard just before HAWCS advised that the suspect was running through residential yards.

The SO with his PSD pursued on foot (Figure 1).



Figure 1 - The suspect (circled in yellow) was pursued by the SO and his PSD (circled in blue) as the suspect ran through residential areas trying to evade police. Image sourced from: HAWCS video.

The suspect is within the SO and his PSD's line of sight, just as the suspect is nearing the side of the house (Figure 2).



Figure 2 - The SO observed the suspect (circled in yellow) as he was running towards the side of a residence. Image sourced from: SO's BWC.

The SO released the PSD's harness as the suspect was entering between the houses (Figure 3).



Figure 3 - The SO released his PSD just as the suspect ran between residences. The yellow arrow indicates the suspect's location and direction just prior to disappearing from view. Image sourced from: WatchGuard video from the SO's police vehicle.

The SO lost sight of his PSD as the PSD ran between the houses (Figure 4).



Figure 4 - The PSD (circled in green) ran off-leash towards the side of the residence where the suspect had previously fled. A moment later, the SO lost sight of his PSD. Image sourced from: SO's BWC.

After the PSD disappeared from view between the houses, the suspect entered the backyard of the residence and ran across the backyard and around to the other side of the residence (Figure 5).



Figure 5 - The suspect (circled in yellow) was seen running through the backyard of the residence and around to the opposite side of the house. The SO (circled in blue) can be seen running in the direction of his PSD who is not visible in the image as he has entered between the houses. Image sourced from: HAWCS video.

When the PSD arrived at the back of the residence, he continued running through an opening in the back fence (Figure 6).



Figure 6 - The PSD (circled in green) ran down the side of the residence and out the back fence into an open area facing a greenspace. The yellow arrow indicates the position and direction of travel of the suspect on the west side of the residence. The blue arrow indicates the position and direction of travel of the SO as he entered the passage on the east side of the residence. Image sourced from: HAWCS video.

The SO could not see his PSD as he ran between the houses (Figure 7).



Figure 7 - The SO entered the passage on the east side of the residence where his PSD and the suspect had previously fled. The PSD is not visible in the image as the PSD has already made it beyond the back fence as reflected in Figure 6. Image sourced from: SO's BWC.

At this point, WO1 was observed parking his police vehicle near the SO's police vehicle and began running in the same direction as the SO.

The SO could be heard yelling canine commands as he ran beside the residence and into the backyard (Figure 8).



Figure 8 - The SO ran into the backyard of the residence. The open gate which leads to an alley and the greenspace beyond the backyard is seen. The PSD is not visible. Image sourced from: SO's BWC.

By this point, the PSD had already run across the back alley and towards the greenspace where the AP and CW1 were standing (Figure 9).



Figure 9 - The PSD (circled in green) running towards the AP (circled in red) and CW1. Image sourced from: HAWCS video.

The PSD ran around in the alley behind the residence for approximately five seconds, seemingly seeking his target. During this time the HAWCS operator advised over the police radio that the PSD was in the alley and that there were kids present.

The AP began running away from the PSD and the PSD then began giving chase (Figure 10).

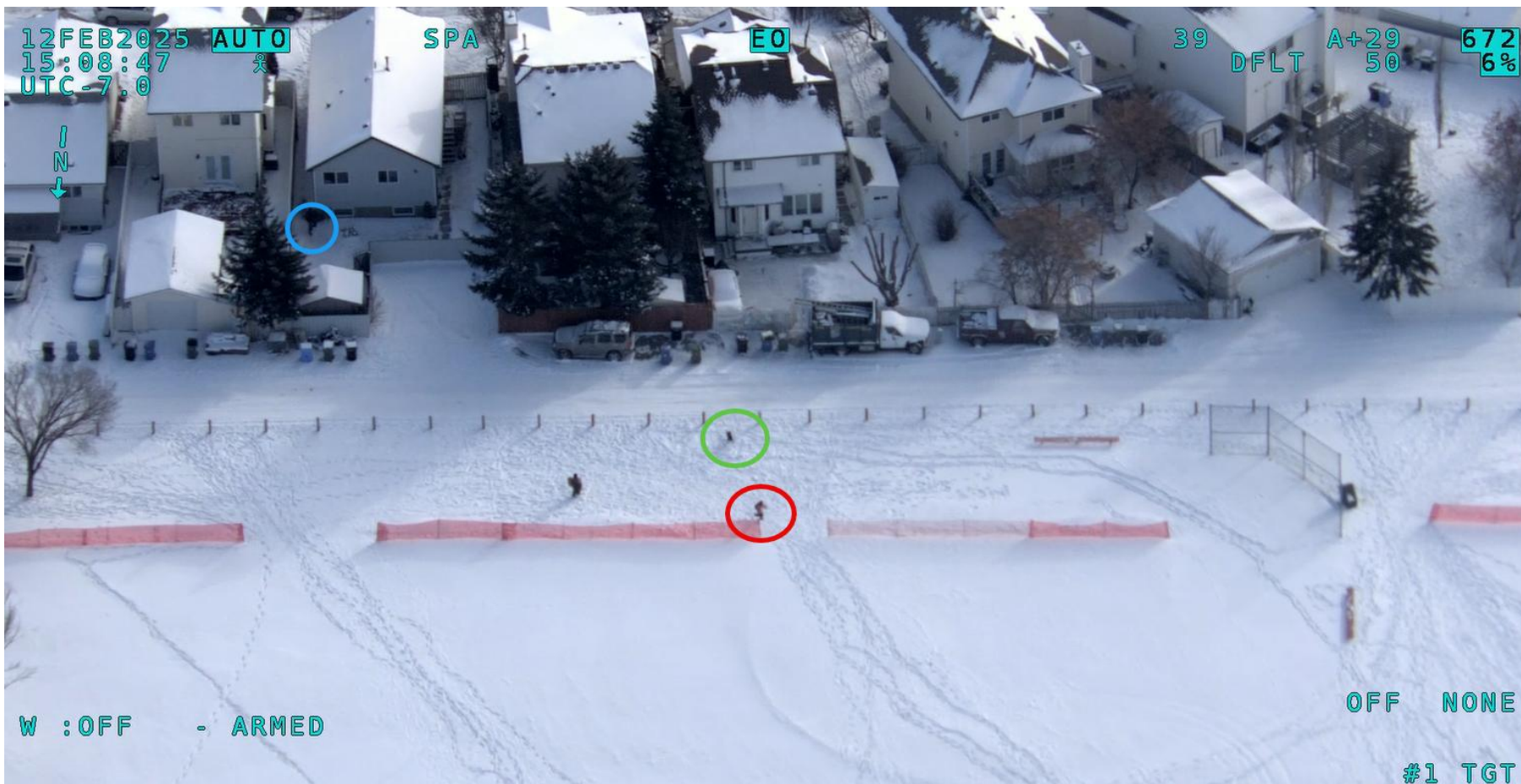


Figure 10 - The AP (circled in red) began running away from the PSD. The PSD (circled in green) began chasing her. CW1 can be seen standing off to the side. The SO (circled in blue) can be seen running through the backyard of the residence. Image sourced from: HAWCS video.

The PSD initially ran past the AP (Figure 11).



Figure 11 - The PSD initially ran past the AP as she ran. Image sourced from: HAWCS video.

The AP turned to run back in the opposite direction. The PSD then turned around and ran towards the AP and lunged at her (Figure 12).

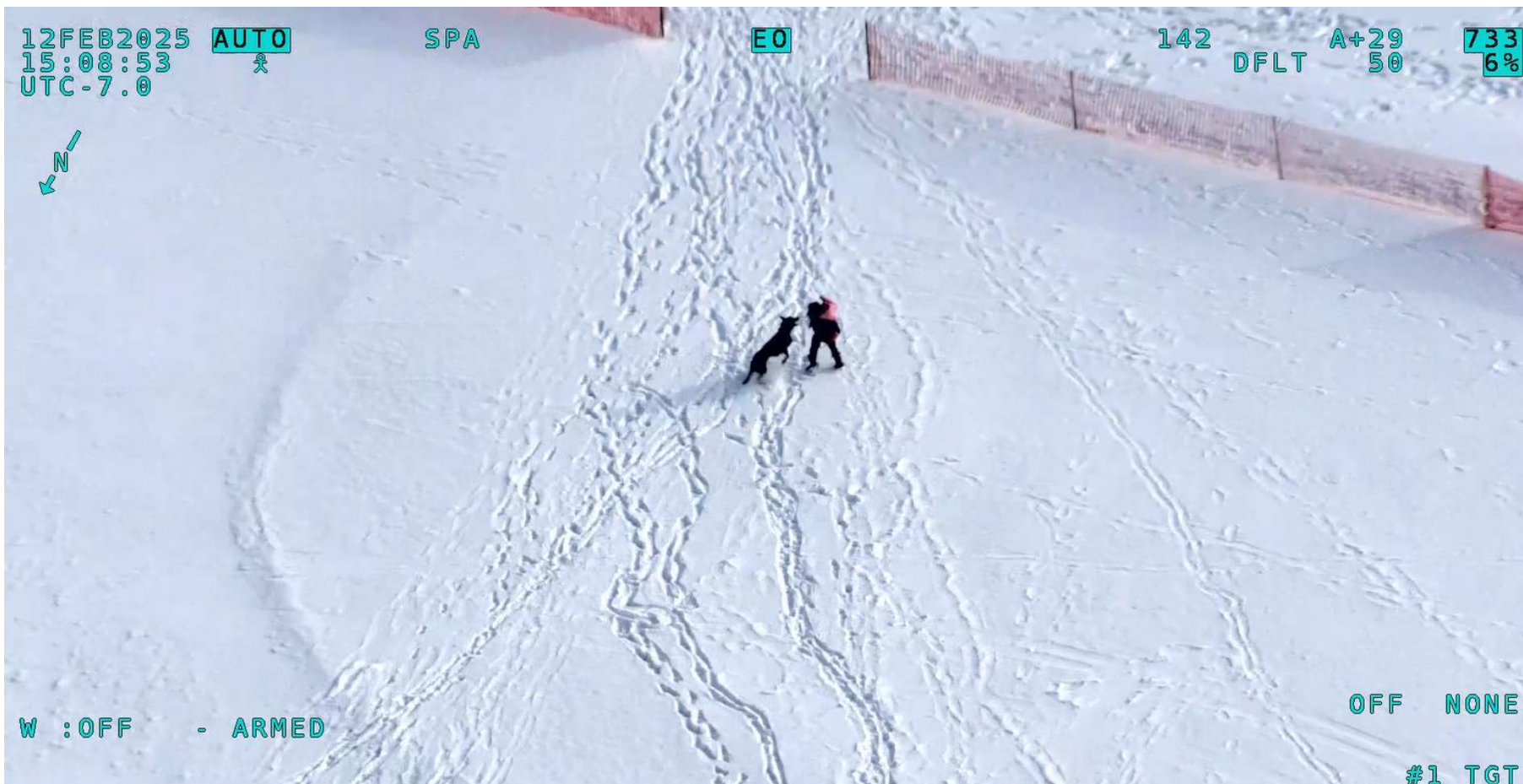


Figure 12 - The PSD ran towards the AP and lunged at her. Image sourced from: HAWCS video.

At this point, the SO had exited the backyard and was making his way towards the alley, in the direction of where the AP, CW1, and his PSD

were located (Figure 13).



Figure 13 - The SO's PSD (identified by green arrow) lunged at the AP (circled in red) as the SO was running towards them. Image sourced from: SO's BWC.

The PSD knocked the AP to the ground and began biting at her backpack and head (Figure 14).



Figure 14 - The PSD knocked the AP to the ground and began biting her. Image sourced from: HAWCS video.

The SO ran towards the AP and his PSD while repeatedly yelling commands at the dog (Figure 15).



Figure 15 - The SO (circled in blue) ran towards the AP and his PSD while yelling commands. Image sourced from: HAWCS video.

The PSD released the AP once the SO got within several feet of their location (Figure 16).



Figure 16 - The PSD releasing the AP's leg as the SO approached. Image sourced from: SO's BWC.

The SO then regained control of his PSD's harness and placed him on a leash. The SO requested the urgent attendance of EMS.

WO1 arrived and tended to the AP who was visibly distraught and crying. EMS subsequently arrived on scene and transported the AP to the hospital.

The SO was observed to be noticeably limping from the time he exited his police vehicle throughout the foot pursuit.

CPS Canine Unit Policies and Standards

ASIRT investigators reviewed the CPS policies and training standards relating to the canine unit as well as the SO's training records. They also reviewed the Canine Law Enforcement Accreditation Registry (CLEAR) non-binding training manual used to establish guidelines for canine handlers by the Canadian Police Canine Association.

Specific criteria have been established by CPS for an officer to be eligible for selection as a canine handler. Members of the CPS Canine Unit must successfully pass quarterly and annual qualifications for skills and weapon systems, an annual fitness test, and meet annual standards of competency for both the handler and the PSD.

At the time of the review, there were no CPS Standard Operating Procedures that addressed when a PSD should be on or off-leash or any training guidelines set out in the relevant Canine Unit manuals, which govern the use of a PSD for the apprehension of a subject. They specify only that an officer will not resort to deploying a PSD to apprehend a subject unless that person is arrestable for a criminal offence and the force used is necessary, reasonable, and proportionate in all the circumstances. Further, where reasonably feasible, before releasing a PSD, the handler will provide the subject with an opportunity to comply by issuing a verbal compliance order. The handler must also consider the likelihood of an innocent person being in the immediate area whose actions might be consistent with those of the offender.

The SO's training records were reviewed. Apart from any fitness training, the records confirm that the SO had completed the requisite training and competency assessments to remain a member of the Canine Unit at the time. It is understood that fitness training is not ordinarily documented in training records as it is completed during officer basic training and as part of competitions for lateral transfers into specialized units. Given that the position profile for the Canine Unit references an annual fitness test, it is unclear why CPS would not maintain records of this training. The SO confirmed that he had not, in fact, completed any fitness assessment since his transfer into the unit. This would suggest that the CPS has not adhered to its own requirements for this position. Given that there are elements of the annual obedience recertification that appear to involve rigorous and require physical exertion, it is possible that this process is also being treated as a fitness test; however, if so, there should be express reference to same on the recertification documents.

The SO and his PSD last completed their annual obedience recertification on December 18, 2024. Of note, the Control Work component of the recertification involved a scenario where the PSD was engaged in an off-leash bite. The handler was required to command the PSD to release the bite, and the PSD was required to release the bite in a reasonable amount of time and not re-engage. An additional scenario involved the PSD being deployed off-leash on a running apprehension of a suspect, who then stopped running and became compliant. The handler was required to successfully command the PSD to not engage the suspect. In both cases, the handler was not permitted to activate the dog's

electronic collar to gain compliance. The SO and his PSD successfully passed these elements of the recertification.

Analysis

ASIRT investigations occur when serious injury or death is caused by a police officer, in addition to other sensitive investigations of police officers. These are criminal investigations only.

Here, the action under investigation is the off-leash deployment of a police service dog by the SO. Although the purpose of the PSD's deployment was to apprehend a suspect in a stolen vehicle investigation, the unintended consequence was that the PSD encountered and bit a child, the AP.

Under s. 25 of the *Criminal Code*, police officers are permitted to use as much force as is necessary for the execution of their duties. For the defence provided by s. 25 to apply to the actions of an officer, the officer must be required or authorized by law to perform the action in the administration or enforcement of the law, must have acted on reasonable grounds in performing the action, and must not have used unnecessary force. All uses of force by police must also be proportionate, necessary, and reasonable.

There is a continuum of force used by officers, and the deployment of a police dog may be considered equivalent to the use of a weapon, such as a baton or pepper spray. Officers deploying police service dogs must comply with the principles of proportionality, necessity, and reasonableness. Canine handlers must maintain control of their dog and are accountable for the actions of their dogs. The handler determines whether and in what manner to deploy a dog based on guidelines, knowledge of the dog, and an assessment of the situation including ensuring reasonable safety for the public. A canine officer may face criminal liability where they deploy their PSD in circumstances that do not adhere to standard training or guidelines, or where they do not adequately control their dog, resulting in injury. Potential offences include criminal negligence causing bodily harm.

Criminal negligence causing bodily harm looks at whether there was a marked and substantial departure from the conduct of a reasonably prudent person. In this case, there is no evidence that this duty was breached to the requisite criminal standard.

The SO was lawfully placed and acting in the execution of his duties in responding to the pursuit of a stolen vehicle that fled from police. The SO was required or authorized by law to apprehend the suspect driver.

The suspect was pursued by police, both in the stolen vehicle and on foot. The suspect disregarded police directions to "stop!" when they observed him running through the neighbourhood. It is not clear which officer yelled that command, but it occurred after the SO had initially pursued the suspect down the back alley and approximately 10 seconds before the PSD was released. There is a 30-second audio delay when a BWC is activated; therefore, it was not possible to confirm that it had been the SO yelling at the suspect to stop. It is clear, however, that a verbal compliance order was made for the suspect to stop running before the PSD was deployed.

Based on the circumstances known to the SO at the time of the PSD deployment – including an active foot pursuit of a suspect fleeing a stolen vehicle, a situation inherently assessed as high risk; the pursuit occurring in a residential area with no civilians in the immediate vicinity; and, the PSD having successfully locked onto a suspect wearing a high-visibility vest at a distance that the SO reasonably believed could be quickly closed – it was reasonable, necessary, and proportionate for the SO to deploy his PSD in an apprehension capacity. There are no policies which dictate that the off-leash

deployment in these circumstances would have been inappropriate or which mandate that the SO maintain a certain proximity to his PSD during its pursuit. The SO had no reason to believe, based on what was known at the time, that he would not have been able to maintain control of his PSD after he was deployed to apprehend the suspect.

There was a confluence of errors that contributed to the unfortunate outcome on this date. Firstly, there were environmental factors that the SO was not aware of at the time he deployed his PSD. For example, the SO was not aware that there was an open greenspace, where children were present, behind the residence that the suspect was running towards. He was also unaware that the backyard gate of that residence had been left open. Secondly, it was not foreseen that the suspect would have been able to evade the PSD, given that he was running into what was presumably, a closed backyard space. Indeed, the video footage confirms that the suspect managed to get out of sight a mere moment before the PSD ran into the backyard. Finally, there is the fact that the AP ran away from the PSD, which the PSD was trained to view as non-compliance, and may have triggered his instinctual response to apprehend.

A review of the video footage supports that several factors could have interfered with the PSD's responsiveness to commands on this date. When the SO initially began shouting commands to his PSD, he was running alongside the residence and his PSD was already in the greenspace; therefore, the SO was a considerable distance away. The HAWCS helicopter was circling overhead throughout and at a certain point, the AP began screaming. The PSD disengaged from the AP in response to the same commands that the SO had been repeatedly yelling, when coupled with the activation of his electronic collar, as the SO got closer. The SO's training records establish that the PSD has consistently demonstrated an ability to comply with his handler's verbal commands alone. It is reasonable to conclude that the other external noise sources may have interfered with the PSD's ability to hear the verbal commands being given, requiring the added activation of his electronic collar.

There is no evidence to suggest that the SO's knee injury interfered with his ability to maintain control of his PSD. It would be speculative to suggest that had the SO been able to keep up with his PSD more closely that the canine engagement may have been prevented. It was one circumstance among several other unforeseen variables that cumulatively contributed to this unfortunate outcome.

Conclusion

On February 12, 2025, the AP was bitten by a PSD while walking home from the park. The PSD had been deployed by the SO to pursue a suspect in a stolen vehicle investigation.

The SO was required or authorized by law to arrest the suspect and acted reasonably in deploying his PSD to apprehend him as he fled. Ultimately, the AP was an unintended target of the PSD. While the outcome was serious and extremely unfortunate, there are no reasonable grounds to believe that an offence was committed.

Original Signed

Matthew Block

Acting Executive Director

May 20, 2026

Date of Release