

August 8, 2025



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**Iowa Attorney General's Review  
of Officer Involved Death**

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Incident of July 1, 2025  
Dubuque County, Iowa

Dubuque County Sheriff's Office Sergeant Adam Williams  
Dubuque Police Department Officer Chad Leitzen  
Monticello Police Officer Cole Millard

Subject Involved: James Young Sherrill

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## **Executive Summary**

At 4:34 a.m. on July 1, 2025, members of the Dubuque Drug Task Force, in conjunction with additional local law enforcement agencies, conducted a traffic stop on a pickup truck known to be driven by James Young Sherrill. Sherrill had been under investigation for drug activity, was known to go armed, and had recently made statements that if he was stopped by law enforcement he would commit “suicide by cop.”

During the traffic stop, Sherrill turned off the pickup and placed his hands out the window. However, he refused to drop the keys outside or exit the vehicle despite numerous commands. He eventually re-started the truck’s engine but was stopped by Sergeant Adam Williams of the Dubuque County Sheriff’s Office. He struggled with Sgt. Williams over the keys. Sherrill was tased twice but continued to resist.

When Sherrill then began to raise a handgun toward Sergeant Williams, Dubuque Officer Chad Leitzen fired on Sherrill. Sherrill continued to struggle with Sgt. Williams over the gun despite Sherrill’s injuries. Sergeant Williams, Officer Leitzen, and Monticello Police Officer Cole Millard fired on Sherrill until he was no longer a threat. Sherrill was pronounced dead in the ambulance while en route to the Dubuque County Hospital.

## Detailed Factual Summary

In the early morning hours of July 1, 2025, members of the Dubuque Drug Task Force began surveillance on James Young Sherrill as part of a drug investigation. They were made aware that he had a criminal history that included state and federal weapons charges, drug charges, and money laundering. He was known to go armed with a handgun at all times and had recently indicated that if he were discovered by law enforcement he would commit “suicide by cop” because he refused to go back to prison.

Officers knew Sherrill was driving a black 2008 Chevrolet Silverado pickup with heavily tinted windows in Jones County near Cascade. Investigators enlisted the help of Monticello Police Officer Cole Millard, who was on duty that morning in a marked patrol SUV. Millard waited in the median of Highway 151, watching for the pickup. Eventually a vehicle matching the pickup’s description passed Millard going north on Highway 151. It was being followed by two unmarked SUVs occupied by members of the Dubuque Drug Task Force and a state narcotics agent. Though officers did not confirm it until later, the pickup was driven by Sherrill.

At 4:34 a.m., once the pickup was north of Cascade, Millard initiated a traffic stop. Because of Sherrill’s criminal

history and knowledge that he regularly carried a handgun, the stop was conducted as a “high-risk” stop. Officer Millard parked his vehicle approximately three car lengths behind the pickup. Sergeant Adam Williams of the Dubuque County Sheriff’s Office took up position on the passenger side of Millard’s patrol vehicle, using the open passenger door as cover. Both officers had their handguns drawn and aimed at the pickup. Backup was provided by members of the Dubuque County Sheriff’s Office, the Dubuque Police Department, the Jones County Sheriff’s Office, and the State Department of Narcotics Enforcement (DNE). Additional officers arrived and took up support positions at Officer Millard’s patrol vehicle.

Williams commanded Sherrill to turn off the pickup’s engine and place his hands outside the window, and Sherrill complied. Williams then directed Sherrill to drop the pickup’s keys out the window onto the ground. Sherrill did not and instead began to ask why he was being stopped. Williams stated that he would answer Sherrill’s questions once Sherrill was out of the pickup. He again commanded Sherrill to drop the keys on the ground and get out of the pickup using the outside door handle. Sherrill again did not comply.

The conversation became circular, with Sgt. Williams repeatedly ordering Sherrill to drop the pickup’s keys and get

out while Sherrill repeatedly asked why he had been stopped. Williams eventually stated that he and the other officers needed to make sure they were safe before he would continue the conversation. Sherrill eventually stated that there was no one else in the pickup aside from his dog and that there were no weapons and no guns in the pickup.

After several minutes of Sherrill's refusing to get out of the pickup, officers decided to approach. Officer Millard, now armed with his rifle, and Sgt. Williams, still armed with his handgun, approached the driver's side of the pickup. They were joined by a Jones County deputy, who had handcuffs ready, and another Dubuque police officer, who had a taser. The Jones County deputy grabbed Sherrill's wrist and attempted to handcuff him. Sherrill pulled his hand away and said, "Don't touch me." He continued asking questions of Williams and kept his hands out the window. He confirmed he was Sherrill but refused to step out until he knew what was going on.

On the passenger side of the vehicle, Dubuque Police Officer Chad Leitzen approached with his handgun drawn, followed by a Dubuque police officer and an agent from the DNE. Due to the significant window tint on the vehicle, Leitzen was initially unable to see through the passenger

window into the cab of the pickup. When he placed the mounted light from his handgun against the window, he could see into the pickup and confirmed that Sherrill and his dog were the only occupants.

The talk on the driver's side of the pickup again became circular with Williams ordering Sherrill to get out of the pickup and Sherrill refusing to comply. Williams again explained that the officers had to make sure they were safe before they could continue. Sherrill stated he did not have anything dangerous in the vehicle. Officer Leitzen, from the passenger side, saw that Sherrill had a knife sheath on the right side of his waistband and told the other officers. When those officers stated that they knew about the knife, Sherrill replied that he did have a knife, and it was a "legal knife."

After several more minutes, Sherrill sighed, leaned back in his seat, and suddenly pulled his right hand back into the pickup and started the ignition. As the truck roared to life, several officers, thinking a pursuit was imminent, began running toward their vehicles. Sgt. Williams, however, reached into the pickup with his left hand and turned the ignition key off. All officers returned to Sherrill's vehicle. Sgt. Williams, fearing a pursuit that would endanger the officers

and the public, did not want Sherrill to restart the engine and struggled with Sherrill over control of the key.

Seeing that Sherrill was actively fighting against Williams, Officer Nick Soppe of the Dubuque Police Department fired his taser, which struck Sherrill in the left side. Sherrill began to yell and thrash his body but was not incapacitated. Soppe fired a second taser cartridge. This again struck Sherrill but did not incapacitate him.

By this time, Officer Leitzen had opened the passenger door of the pickup and could hear the clicking of the taser charge. As soon as the taser stopped, Leitzen saw Sherrill reach his right hand down toward the floor of the pickup and come back up with a handgun. Leitzen shouted “gun” and fired his own handgun, striking Sherrill in the right side of his torso and back.

Sgt. Williams, on the driver’s side, had also seen Sherrill’s right hand starting to raise a handgun. Williams still had his left arm in the vehicle and used it to grab Sherrill’s right hand so Sherrill could not raise the gun. He could feel Sherrill actively trying to raise the gun toward him and fought with Sherrill through the open window to gain control of the gun.

Officer Leitzen shouted “gun” multiple times to alert the other officers of the threat. He saw that his initial shots had

not stopped Sherrill from trying to raise the gun toward Williams and he fired again. At the same time Officer Millard, on the driver's side of the vehicle had heard "gun" and heard gunfire and began firing on Sherrill with his rifle. Sgt. Williams was able to use his right hand to draw his handgun, stepped back into the travel lane of Highway 151, and fired on Sherrill. As soon as the officers perceived that Sherrill was no longer a threat, they stopped firing. At some point during the encounter, Williams's left hand was struck by gunfire.

Officers notified dispatch that officers had fired and that one officer and the driver of the pickup needed medical attention. Officers had backed away from the pickup but could still see some movement from Sherrill and so did not approach. Officers on the passenger side confirmed the gun was in Sherrill's right hand, pointed toward their side of the pickup. When it appeared Sherrill was no longer moving, officers approached and retrieved the gun from his right hand, placing it on the bed of the truck. They checked Sherrill but did not detect a pulse. An ambulance arrived to transport Sherrill, who was declared dead while on the way to the Dubuque County Hospital.

## **Subsequent Investigation**

Sherrill was carrying a 9mm Geisler handgun, loaded with 14 rounds, including one in the chamber. The blade of the knife on his hip was between three and four inches long. In his pickup, Sherrill was carrying more than five pounds of methamphetamine. He was also carrying a drug scale; what appeared to be heroin, cocaine, and marijuana; more than \$15,000 in cash; and a ledger. Sherrill also had five cell phones and three tablets.

## **Process and Authority**

The Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI) investigated the incident, and its investigation is complete. DCI interviewed the officers involved and reviewed the officers' body camera recordings and dash camera recordings where available. DCI reviewed evidence and reports from the Dubuque Police Department, Jones County Sheriff's Office, Iowa State Patrol, and Office of the State Medical Examiner.

The Attorney General's Office has authority under Iowa Code § 13.12 to assess any officer-involved death to determine whether criminal charges are warranted. The office has had a full opportunity to review the findings of the investigation and discuss the investigation with the assigned agent. All law

enforcement reports, including audio or video recordings, will be returned to DCI when this report is issued.

### **Applicable Law**

To be justified, the force an officer uses must be reasonable. Force is reasonable if a reasonable person, in like circumstances, would judge the force to be necessary to prevent an injury or loss. It can include deadly force if (1) it is reasonable to believe that such force is necessary to avoid injury or risk to the person's or another person's life or safety and (2) it is reasonable to believe that such force is necessary to resist a like force or threat. Iowa Code §§ 704.1, 704.2, and 704.3.

In *Graham v. Connor*, 490 U.S. 386 (1989), the United States Supreme Court held that the use of deadly force by a police officer must be evaluated from the perspective of a reasonable police officer on the scene and in the same circumstances. Under *Graham*, reasonableness of police use of force cannot be evaluated from the perspective of a civilian or the perspective afforded by 20/20 hindsight. The Court further stated that the fact that law enforcement officers are often required to react quickly in tense, uncertain, and rapidly evolving situations are factors that must be considered in

determining reasonableness. Since *Graham*, the Supreme Court has narrowed the analysis to focus on the exact moment that the force was applied.

### **Analysis**

Multiple agencies conducted a traffic stop on James Sherrill knowing that he had previous firearms convictions, was known to go armed, and had indicated that before he would go back to prison he would commit “suicide by cop.” Sherrill at first appeared to cooperate with the traffic stop by turning off his engine and placing his hands out the window. But when told to relinquish his keys and get out of the vehicle, he refused—repeatedly, and for several minutes. He lied that he had no weapons and no guns in the pickup, when in reality he had a knife on his hip and a handgun within reach that he would later use to try to shoot Sgt. Williams. As officers approached, Sherrill again refused to be handcuffed and refused to get out of the vehicle.

Sherrill ultimately restarted the truck engine, signaling his intention to flee, though Sergeant Williams was able to thwart that attempt by turning the truck off. Officers twice tased Sherrill to attempt to gain compliance, but he continued to resist. Instead of dropping his keys on the ground and

exiting the pickup as he had been repeatedly commanded, he grabbed a handgun and began to raise it toward Sgt. Williams. It was clear that Sherrill intended to begin shooting at Sgt. Williams, who was within arm's reach, and other officers who were mere feet away.

Officers were confronted with a person who had repeatedly disobeyed commands intended to keep the officers and the public safe. Attempts to take Sherrill into custody through voluntary compliance had failed for several minutes, as had less-than-lethal means. Sherrill had signaled his intention to flee, endangering officers and other persons on the road, and, in raising a handgun toward Sgt. Williams, was now acting to kill the officers to make good on that intention to flee. Sgt. Williams and Officers Leitzen and Millard were justified in using deadly force to respond to that imminent threat.

### **Conclusion**

The Iowa Attorney General's Office concludes that the officers' actions in this incident were legally justified and that criminal charges are unwarranted. It considers the criminal investigation into this incident to be closed.