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Iowa Attorney General's Review of Officer-Involved Death

Incident of February 4, 2026
Marion, Iowa

Marion Police Officer Spenser Hartman

Subject Involved: Saber Jonathan Bernard

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Executive Summary

On the morning of February 4, 2026, Marion Police Officer Spenser Hartman responded to a residential neighborhood for a call that a person wanted to talk to an officer, but who had initially stated there was no emergency. At the scene the officer encountered two people on the sidewalk, Saber Jonathan Bernard and one of his neighbors. She said they had been discussing God, evil and salvation. Though he had requested law enforcement be called, Bernard seemed reluctant to talk to the officer, and asked the officer why he worked "for evil."

After several minutes Bernard pulled out a machete-style weapon and began gesturing toward Officer Hartman and the second officer who had responded, Officer Greene. Bernard refused commands to drop the weapon. Officer Greene deployed the Taser, but with no significant effect. Bernard then charged at Officer Hartman, stating "God is my savior! You will not stop me! Kill me!" Officer Hartman was backing away, but Bernard was closing the gap. Officer Hartman fired one shot from his handgun at Bernard, who was struck in the abdomen and immediately dropped the machete. Officers immediately began lifesaving measures. Bernard was transported to a local hospital where he died from his injury.

Detailed Factual Summary

At approximately 7:52 a.m. on the morning of February 4, 2026, a woman called the Marion Police Department non-emergency line to request an officer come speak with someone. She had been talking with a neighbor who requested to talk to an officer. He would not say why, but indicated he was not in danger and there was no emergency. Officer Spenser Hartman was assigned to the call and planned to proceed to the address once he concluded his present task.

A few minutes later, Officer Hartman was notified that the woman had called back, this time to 911, to request an officer come more quickly as the conversation had started to involve discussion of the afterlife. Officer Hartman immediately responded to the residential neighborhood.

On arrival, Officer Hartman found a young man and a woman talking on a sidewalk in front of one of the homes. Officer Hartman remained by the curb. The woman was dressed in a winter coat. The man was wearing sweatpants, a sweatshirt and a hat, with his hood pulled up. He had his hands in his pants pockets.

The woman addressed the officer and introduced the young man as her neighbor, Saber. She relayed that he had come out this morning to ask for some help. He had been talking about heaven and hell and some significant existential topics. He had told her not

to go to school today, but that he was not in danger and no one he knew was in danger. As the woman was talking with the officer, the male, later identified as Saber Jonathan Bernard, watched the officer and swayed slightly back and forth from foot to foot.

Officer Hartman asked Bernard if he wanted to talk, but Bernard said "no." The woman encouraged him to do so, but Bernard shifted from foot to foot, looking away, then at the officer. Upon questioning, Bernard relayed where he had gone to school. When the officer asked if he wanted to talk privately, away from the neighbor, Bernard responded "I don't know." The neighbor again encouraged that it would be good if he spoke with the officer.

Bernard then looked at the officer and asked if he believed in God. When the officer confirmed that he did, Bernard paused for several seconds and asked, "Then why are you working for evil?" When asked what he had said, Bernard repeated the question. Officer Hartman stated that he worked for the Marion Police Department and Bernard indicated that was evil. Throughout this conversation, Bernard kept his hands in his pants pockets and shifted back and forth from foot to foot.

Officer Hartman shifted the conversation to find out which house Bernard lived at and offered to talk at the house given how cold the weather was outside. Bernard declined, continuing to shift his weight and look at the officer. Officer Hartman inquired why

he had asked for an officer to be called and Bernard responded, "for a deeper reason," but when asked what the reason was, indicated he could not tell him. Bernard then began to turn away from the officer, then back to the neighbor.

The neighbor suggested that Bernard tell the officer about his girlfriend. Bernard smiled and asked if the officer knew her, giving her name. The officer told Bernard he did not know her. Bernard then asked if the officer knew about "Adam and Eve," to which the officer confirmed he did. Bernard then got quiet again, shifting his weight and looking away from, then back at the officer. Bernard then stated, "I really don't want to do this" and turned away from the officer, taking his right hand out of his pocket and wiping his face.

Officer Hartman asked, "Do what buddy?" Bernard did not respond. The neighbor asked Bernard what could help him and he responded "God. Jesus." She then offered to pray with him. The woman held Bernard's right hand and prayed for help for him, that he could be strong and to guide his steps. She prayed that he would see that they were all there to help him and to see the good in the world. During the prayer Bernard started to cry.

While the parties were still praying, Marion Police Officer Alex Greene arrived to assist and joined Officer Hartman by the curb. Officer Hartman requested that Officer Greene keep an eye on

Bernard's hands, as his left hand had remained in his pocket during the entire time. As the prayer concluded Bernard turned completely away from the officers, and they asked the woman to come walk over to them to talk about the situation.

As the woman stepped toward the officers, they saw Bernard turn back toward them all, pulling a large machete-style weapon out of his sweatshirt.

Bernard then came toward Officer Hartman with bouncing side-steps, with the machete perpendicular to his body and down at his right, as if ready to swing from the side. Officer Hartman drew his

firearm and began to take steps back, immediately directing Bernard to "drop it." Officer Hartman continuously repeated this command as Bernard came at him, then took side-steps back to the sidewalk. Officer Greene stayed to Officer Hartman's right in the street, also drawing his firearm. The witness moved away from the scene for her own safety.

After five commands to drop the weapon with no sign of compliance, Officer Hartman asked Officer Greene if he had a Taser. Officer Greene stepped back toward the opposite side of the street, holstered his firearm and drew his Taser. Bernard then squared his body directly at Officer Greene and began taking steps in his direction. Officer Hartman then came back closer to Bernard's front left side and gave him several more commands to "drop it." Bernard did not comply and instead pointed the machete directly at Officer Hartman. Officer Hartman stepped toward Bernard, continuously ordering him to drop the weapon. In total, Officer Hartman told Bernard to drop the machete fifteen times. At no time did Bernard make any attempt to relinquish his blade.

Bernard then began walking along the sidewalk toward Officer Hartman's direction and stated, "Jesus Lord is my refuge." Officer Greene deployed his Taser at Bernard's left side. Bernard flinched and stepped off the sidewalk into the yard, but continued walking

in Officer Hartman's direction without any significant impact from the Taser. Officer Greene discarded the Taser and drew his firearm.

Bernard again stated "Jesus Lord is my savior. Nothing will stop me!" He then turned to fully face Officer Hartman, who began taking steps back across and along the street to maintain a safe distance. Officer Hartman lost visual of Officer Greene. Officer Hartman repeated commands for the witness to "get inside" as she retreated. As he was issuing those commands, Bernard advanced on him at a quicker pace, extending his arms and yelling "Kill me right now! Kill me!" Bernard was advancing faster and was closing the gap between them.

Officer Hartman fired one shot, which hit Bernard in the abdomen. Bernard dropped the machete and fell to the ground, yelling. Officer Greene radioed "shots fired" and both officers converged on Bernard to get him secured. They ordered him to roll over, but Bernard refused, tensing his body and resisting. He responded "No! Do not touch me. The Lord is my savior."

The officers were able to secure Bernard in handcuffs so that he could not regain control of the machete and rolled him onto his back. Officer Hartman called over the radio "shots fired" and also requested an ambulance. Officer Hartman then immediately began chest compressions. He and Officer Greene continued lifesaving

measures until the ambulance arrived. Bernard was transported to a local hospital where he died from his injury.

Subsequent Investigation

Recovered from the scene was the machete Bernard had wielded at the officers. It was approximately 24" from hilt to tip with a smooth outer edge and an interior serrated edge. No information was provided by witnesses as to how he came to be in possession of the weapon.

Witnesses who were interviewed revealed that the night before, Bernard had been sending and posting intense messages continuously directing people to repent, warning those who did not would burn in hell. He expressed that he wanted those he loved to repent so they would join him in the afterlife. He made vague

statements about ICE, the Epstein files and COVID. He mentioned the sounding of the "seventh trumpet," a biblical reference to apocalyptic events. He had messaged family and friends not to go to school because it wasn't safe and had messaged a family member that "It is time for slaughter for the humans that sacrifice their kids to the School System."

It was relayed to the family by friends who were with him on the evening of February 3, 2026, that Bernard had locked himself in his room and could be heard crying. During that time is when he began to send out the messages and posting on social media. This information was unable to be corroborated by law enforcement.

In the morning, when family went to ask him about the messages, he was in his room tearing up money and speaking about being scared to go outside. He believed there was evil outside and people who were watching him. When the family member went to contact another family member to see what they should do, Saber left the house without anyone knowing.

Bernard had been on probation for car burglaries at the time of his death. He had previously been seen by a mental health counselor but was not on any prescription medication when he died.

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 car cameras. DCI interviewed civilian witnesses with knowledge of the time leading up to the events. DCI reviewed evidence and reports from additional law enforcement personnel from the Marion Police Department, Linn County Sheriff's Office, and Iowa State Patrol. DCI also reviewed evidence from the Iowa 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.

Analysis

Officer Spenser Hartman was justified in the shooting death of Saber Jonathan Bernard. What started as a simple call to talk to someone who requested their assistance quickly escalated into a lethal situation when Bernard pulled a weapon on the officers.

Bernard had requested that the neighbor have an officer come talk with him. From the beginning of the encounter, the witness and Officer Hartman attempted to engage Bernard in conversation to find out what he needed. The conversation was calm and civil, if unproductive. When asked why he wanted an officer there, Bernard

said it was for "a deeper reason" that he could not reveal. At an impasse, the neighbor prayed with him. Nothing up to that point had been confrontational.

When Bernard pulled a two-foot machete from under his clothes, he made it clear that he had called officers there to do harm to them. The officers, despite being faced with a deadly weapon, sought first to neutralize the threat with verbal commands. Fifteen times total Officer Hartman directed Bernard to drop the weapon, but he refused, instead pointing the blade at the officers and flailing his arms with it. When the verbal commands were ineffective, a Taser was used. This less lethal option was also unsuccessful in de-escalating the situation. Bernard flinched from the hit but continued regardless. It was then that he advanced on Officer Hartman directly, despite the officer's gun pointed at him. Bernard began to close the distance with the officer, bringing the threat ever closer with every step. He yelled at the officer that he would not be stopped and to kill him.

Officer Hartman could not safely turn his back on Bernard. He had lost visual of Officer Greene and the civilian witness and feared for their safety as well. All attempts at non-lethal options had failed, and in fact the threat had only escalated. The officer met a lethal threat with lethal force and was justified in doing so.

Conclusion

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