April 1, 2026

Iowa Attorney General's Review of Officer-Involved Death

Incident of February 19, 2026
Des Moines, Iowa

Des Moines Police Department Officers Christian Escobar and James Gano

Subject Involved: Hunter Thomas Munoz

KEISHA F. CRETSINGER
Statewide Prosecutions Section Chief

BRENNA BIRD
Attorney General of Iowa
1305 E. Walnut Street
Des Moines, Iowa 50319
(515) 281-5164

Executive Summary

On the afternoon of February 19, 2026, Des Moines Police were dispatched to a stabbing at the Crisis Observation Center (COC), located near the intersection of Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway and Carpenter Avenue in Des Moines. They were initially informed that a patient had stabbed a security guard and the victim was trapped in a room with the patient.

Officer Christian Escobar was the first to arrive on scene and encountered the patient, Hunter Thomas Munoz, walking into the street near the COC. Officer Escobar drew his firearm and directed Munoz to get on his knees. Munoz responded that the officer was going to have to shoot him. Officer Escobar attempted to verbally de-escalate the situation, but Munoz would only repeat they were going to have to shoot him and did not comply with commands.

Des Moines Officers David Chase and James Gano arrived at the intersection to assist. Officer Chase had drawn his Taser and Officer Gano his firearm. Munoz continued to state that officers were going to have to shoot him. Officer Chase deployed his Taser as Munoz pulled a stiletto knife from his back pocket. Munoz then ran at Officer Escobar with the knife clenched in his fist and both Officer Escobar and Officer Gano fired. Munoz fell to the ground where officers immediately secured him and began life saving measures. Munoz died from his injuries.

Detailed Factual Summary

At 3:47 p.m. on Thursday, February 19, 2026, Des Moines Police received a 911 call that a public safety officer had been attacked by a patient at the Crisis Intervention Center (COC), located at 1914 Carpenter Avenue in Des Moines. As multiple officers responded, dispatch began receiving additional 911 calls about the attack from staff and members of the public inside the building. They were informed that the safety officer had been stabbed and were given a description of the attacker. This information was relayed to all responding officers. They were soon notified that the subject had exited the building, but witnesses did not know which direction he was heading. The subject would later be identified as Hunter Thomas Munoz.

Officer Christian Escobar, upon hearing the call from dispatch, realized he was the closest officer to the COC and indicated he would respond. Officers David Chase and James Gano, operating in a two-man car, also began heading toward the scene. Medical personnel were dispatched to aid the safety officer but were directed to stage at a safe distance until the scene was secured.

The COC is located at the southeast corner of the intersection of Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway and Carpenter Avenue in Des Moines. Officer Escobar parked his patrol vehicle at the corner of the intersection next to the COC parking lot and notified dispatch

that he had located the subject. Officer Escobar observed Munoz walking from the parking lot of the COC onto Carpenter Avenue. Officer Escobar immediately got out of his vehicle and ordered Munoz to put his hands up at gunpoint. Munoz continued to walk toward the officer until he was directed a second time to put his hands up. He then stopped and briefly held his hands out to his sides. Officer Escobar could see there was nothing in his hands, but noted that he was breathing heavy, had blood on his face and had two taser probes embedded in the front of his coat. Officer Escobar then began ordering Munoz to get on his knees. Instead, Munoz pulled his hands to his chest, shook his head and said, "you're going to have to shoot me", as he again began walking toward the officer.

This exchange went back and forth as Officer Escobar continued to order Munoz to get on his knees, with Munoz responding that the officer would have to shoot him. As Munoz slowly advanced, Officer Escobar realized Munoz was getting closer to the driver's door of his patrol vehicle. While still holding Munoz at gunpoint, Officer Escobar secured his vehicle so that Munoz would not have access to it. As he did this Officer Escobar repeated commands for Munoz to get on his knees and Munoz repeated, "you're going to have to shoot me." Officer Escobar responded, "I don't want to shoot you."

Munoz continued to walk toward the officer and Officer Escobar began walking backward, maintaining a safe distance. He

attempted to verbally de-escalate the situation by telling Munoz, "It's alright, it's ok. My name is Christian." Munoz continued to walk forward, and Officer Escobar began to round the back of his patrol vehicle for safety and to stay out of the intersection behind him.

Officer Escobar then asked Munoz where the knife was. Munoz responded that the knife was in his back pocket. At this point Munoz was at the rear driver corner of the vehicle and had stopped walking. Officer Escobar then repeated commands for Munoz to get on his knees and told him it was going to be ok. Munoz did not respond but began to look out into the intersection. Three lanes of traffic were stopped at the traffic light of Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway.

Munoz then turned and went north, crossing into the westbound lanes of Carpenter Avenue. At that time Officer Escobar responded to a dispatch inquiry on his status and he notified them that the subject was not compliant and that he was indicating officers would have to shoot him. This information was heard by other responding officers.

Munoz then began walking west, directly toward the travel lanes of Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway. Officer Escobar rotated to continue to face Munoz and repeated commands to "get down on your knees", but Munoz did not comply. He repeated, "you're going

to have to shoot me." Munoz then stopped at the northeast corner of the intersection near the curb. Officer Escobar began to holster his weapon. However, when Munoz saw this, he reached his right hand to his back right pocket. Officer Escobar immediately raised his firearm back at Munoz and told him to stop.

Munoz began to again walk at the officer, backing him into the intersection, but still had nothing in his hands. He repeated, "you're going to have to shoot me", to which Officer Escobar responded, "I'm not going to shoot you." Munoz stopped, looked at the ground and shook his head.

At this time Officers Chase and Gano arrived and approached the intersection from the COC parking lot. Officer Chase immediately announced that he had non-lethal as he approached with his Taser drawn. Officer Gano stayed at Officer Chase's side and had drawn his firearm. Munoz looked at Officer Chase and said, "you're going to have to shoot me." Officer Chase activated the Taser, which emitted a flashing light and audible warning signal, but still Munoz did not comply with multiple commands to get on his knees. Munoz turned his body to face Officer Chase, but began walking backward into the southbound lanes of the intersection and moved his right hand to his back right pants pocket. He then gestured toward Officer Escobar and said, "he's going to have to

shoot me." Officer Escobar rotated and moved to his right so that he, Officer Gano and Officer Chase were in a line facing Munoz.

Officer Chase then deployed his Taser. At the same time, Munoz pulled out a stiletto style knife, holding it in his fist with the blade down as he advanced on Officer Escobar. Officer Chase deployed additional Taser barbs, but with no apparent effect. As Munoz came toward the officers, they told him "no" and started to step back to stay out of harm's way. Munoz then began to run at Officers Escobar and Gano with the knife raised as if to stab them. Both men fired their weapons, and Munoz fell to the ground. The officers immediately stopped firing and were able to secure Munoz in handcuffs. They notified others via radio that shots had been fired and medical was needed. They then began to coordinate lifesaving measures. Munoz was taken to the hospital and died from his injuries.

Subsequent Investigation

Evidence collected during the investigation showed that Munoz had been brought by family to the COC for a mental health evaluation. He had been evaluated and treated in previous years, but had stopped taking his medications and his symptoms were worsening. He waited calmly for approximately thirty minutes in the waiting room.

When his name was called, Munoz was taken to the secure area where patients are seen. Before he was to enter the triage room, he was asked by a security officer in the hall to empty his pockets and was told he would be searched for weapons. Munoz took his phone and other items out of his pockets and placed them on the counter. The security officer prepared to "wand" Munoz for weapons when Munoz pulled a knife from his jacket pocket and stabbed the officer in his right shoulder and chest area near the collar bone.

The officer fought back, but as a result of the struggle fell backward into the triage room. Munoz continued to stab at the officer, who initially was able to defend himself by kicking at Munoz. While still on the ground the officer deployed his Taser, but it was not effective. Another staff member came to the door yelling at Munoz, which drew his attention away from the injured officer. His attention then went back and forth between the officer and the staff member. The distraction was enough time for the officer to produce his OC/pepper spray and spray it at Munoz. Munoz turned his head quickly to avoid getting the spray in his face and he left the triage room. He lingered in the hallway for a brief time before exiting the building where he encountered the Des Moines officers.

All other staff members and patients at the COC that day remained safe, as staff had activated lock-down procedures during the attack. The security officer sustained critical injuries and was

transported to the hospital. His condition stabilized and he was released after several days. His recovery is ongoing.

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 and collected video evidence from various locations. DCI reviewed evidence and reports from additional law enforcement personnel from the Des Moines Police Department. DCI also reviewed evidence from and consulted with 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

Des Moines Police Officers Christian Escobar and James Gano were justified in their use of deadly force against Hunter Thomas Munoz. Officers went into a known violent situation and attempted numerous methods of de-escalation before Munoz ran at them with a knife. The time between Officer Escobar's first commands to Munoz to show his hands and shots being fired was approximately

84 seconds. In that time officers directed Munoz to get on his knees 24 times. Munoz told them at least seven times that they would have to shoot him.

Officers were initially called out to a stabbing at a mental health clinic. This told them they were dealing with a violent individual who was armed and may be having a mental health crisis, all indicators of a high-risk situation. When Officer Escobar initially encountered Munoz in the street, he could see two Taser barbs in his clothing, another indication as to the level of force that had been involved in the prior attack.

Orders at gunpoint did not gain compliance, language aimed at minimizing the intensity of the situation did not work, and Munoz continued to gravitate toward traffic, endangering the general public. At one point Officer Escobar began to holster his weapon to de-escalate the situation. However, when the officer began to back off his show of force, Munoz increased his by reaching for his back pocket and the knife. Only because of that increase in volatility did Officer Escobar raise his firearm back toward Munoz.

Additional officers arrived and attempted to gain compliance without force. It was clear that they intended to use a Taser rather than their firearms. All three officers were within feet of Munoz attempting to gain compliance without the application of physical force.

Instead of getting on the ground as instructed when at gunpoint and alerted to imminent Taser deployment, Munoz drew his knife and stepped toward Officer Escobar. Then while being hit by Taser barbs, Munoz ran directly at Officer Escobar with the knife raised in his fist. Officers fired their weapons only then, and only until Munoz went to the ground and was no longer a threat.

Ultimately when faced with two firearms and a Taser, Hunter Munoz made the decision to draw his knife and charge at the officers, leaving the officers no choice but to respond with deadly force.

Conclusion

The Iowa Attorney General's Office concludes that the law enforcement 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.