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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date:

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Weld DA: County Leads the Way in Officer-Involved Shooting Investigations

GREELEY, Colo. (Weld County D.A.) – Luke Miller. Shawn Mondragon. Two men who really have nothing in common, except they were both shot and killed by law enforcement in Weld County.

In Miller’s case, he was wanted on two felony warrants for absconding from parole and domestic violence. On February 25, Evans police spotted Miller darting away from an abandoned building. When an officer encountered him, Miller used a stolen handgun to shoot at the officer. He was later shot and killed after pointing the stolen firearm at officers.

Flash forward to May 11, Shawn Mondragon – who was also wanted for a parole violation after attempting to hit an officer with his car – robbed a woman at a local business and led police on a high-speed chase. He then carjacked a college student at gunpoint. That action cost him his life when two Greeley officers were forced to open fire.

As of late, Americans are inundated with similar stories. Countless headlines containing the three words we all know too well: officer-involved shooting, fill our computer screens. Following a common theme, viewers then witness the aftermath: protests, riots, peace talks, typically followed by the clearing of an officer. Many citizens across the country find the latter part muddy, at best.

Why was the officer cleared? Who investigated? Where are all the facts? Granted, in some cases, transparency is murky. But here in Weld County, we do it right. Our process works. And it should serve as an example for the rest of the country.

Our Critical Incident Response Team – CIRT for short – is deployed anytime an officer within the County uses deadly force or attempts to use deadly force with a firearm against a person while on duty. It’s made up of various law enforcement officers across the county. We’ll also use the CIRT team at the request of a Weld County agency during other situations, like in-custody deaths or the death of a police officer in the line of duty.

The filing of a criminal charge is merely a formal accusation that an individual(s) committed a crime(s) under Colorado laws. A defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty. See Colo. RPC 3.6

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Here's the key: The agency involved in the conflict must drop off the CIRT during the investigation to avoid an appearance of a conflict of interest. Before the creation of this team, the public perception was that agencies investigated themselves. Like you, we saw the problem in that perception, so we created CIRT: an agency that provides an unbiased, law and fact-driven view of the case at hand.

When the investigation is completed by the CIRT members, the findings are presented to the District Attorney to determine whether or not the officer was justified in using force.

In the cases of Miller and Mondragon, the officers' actions were justified. But let it be known that CIRT is not a rubber stamp to justify officers' actions. If the team concludes the officer acted outside of his legal boundaries, we will prosecute the officer to the fullest extent as the law allows. The vast majority of law enforcement officers never want to pull the trigger; however, it is necessary to hold everyone, including officers, accountable if they violate the law in order to preserve the integrity of CIRT and our justice system.

We created CIRT more than a year ago, and it has proven successful. We were equally proud to see the state legislature pass a law in 2015 requiring all jurisdictions to develop a protocol to handle officer-involved shootings.

Unfortunately, we know another shooting involving law enforcement will happen. We don't know when. We don't know where. But we can promise this: CIRT will provide a complete, thorough and fair investigation. And we will strive to hold offenders, both citizens and officers, accountable for unlawful actions.

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