



**IN THE MATTER OF THE INJURY OF A WOMAN
WHILE BEING APPREHENDED BY MEMBERS OF THE RCMP
NEAR SQUAMISH , BRITISH COLUMBIA
ON JUNE 21, 2024**

**DECISION OF THE CHIEF CIVILIAN DIRECTOR
OF THE INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATIONS OFFICE**

Chief Civilian Director:

Jessica Berglund

IIO File Number:

2024-138

Date of Release:

August 13, 2026

The release of this public report was delayed pending the conclusion of a concurrent police investigation. The decision on this matter was initially reported on March 6, 2025.

This report details situations that may be distressing to some readers. If you are in crisis, help is available:

- Call 310-6789 to be connected to the crisis centre nearest you (no area code required)
- Crisis Services Canada: crisisservicescanada.ca
- British Columbia: crisislines.bc.ca
- Vancouver and surrounding areas: crisiscentre.bc.ca
- Vancouver Island: vicrisis.ca
- VictimLinkBC: 1-800-563-0808

INTRODUCTION

In the early morning hours of June 21, 2024, RCMP members responded to a call about a vehicle theft and suspicious vehicles in Lions Bay, south of Squamish. An officer on his way to the call saw what appeared to be one of the suspect vehicles on the side of Highway 99. When he turned back and pulled over behind the vehicle, the driver fled into the woods, leaving the vehicle running. A Police Service Dog (“PSD”) handler was called to the scene, and a dog track was initiated. After a short distance, the dog encountered the Affected Person (“AP”) and bit her, causing a serious injury.

The Independent Investigations Office (“IIO”) was notified and commenced an investigation. The narrative that follows is based on evidence collected and analyzed during the investigation, including the following:

- statements of the AP, four paramedics and four witness police officers;
- police Computer-Aided Dispatch (“CAD”) and Police Records Information Management Environment (“PRIME”) records;
- audio recordings of police radio transmissions;
- police training records and policies; and
- medical evidence, including photographs of the AP’s injuries.

The IIO does not require officers who are the subject of an investigation to provide evidence. In this case, the Subject Officer did not provide any account.

NARRATIVE

At 3:16 a.m. on June 21, 2024, police received a 911 call reporting a vehicle theft in Lions Bay. As the stolen vehicle was driven away, the caller saw two other suspects fleeing after apparently setting off a car alarm. One of the suspects, a female, left in a grey Nissan Frontier pickup truck.

At 3:44 a.m., Witness Officer 1 ("WO1") was driving south on Highway 99 towards Lions Bay when he saw what appeared to be the grey Nissan pulled over on the east side of the highway. WO1 turned back, and found that the driver of the Nissan (the AP) had fled into the trees. WO1 queried the Nissan's registration and determined it was a stolen vehicle. He requested that a dog handler attend at his location to assist in tracking the suspect.

The Subject Officer ("SO") is a PSD handler, and attended to assist. At 4:16 a.m., a radio call reported that he had his PSD out and was "casting" around the area of the Nissan for a scent trail. Only 41 seconds later, WO1 radioed for paramedics to attend and, about three minutes after that, he announced that an injured female was in custody, and provided details of her injury.

Interviewed by the IIO, WO1 described the area as wooded, with thick brush, bushes and trees, and no lighting. Witness Officer 2 ("WO2"), who had joined WO1 at the scene, also told investigators that the area was poorly lit. Witness Officer 3 ("WO3"), who was sent from the scene to set up containment to the south, said that the wooded area beside the highway was on an upward incline, dark and heavily covered with foliage.

WO1 described seeing the SO deploy his PSD on a long leash. He said the dog searched around the driver's door of the Nissan for a few seconds, then, "head down, and moving fairly quickly, [it] kind of ran up into the bush." Almost immediately, WO1 said, he heard a woman yelling. He said that the SO had not yet left the roadway when the woman yelled, but moved very quickly into the woods. WO1 shone his flashlight into the trees and saw a woman (the AP) lying face-down approximately 15 to 20 metres up the embankment from the roadway. WO1 said that the SO was near the AP on her right side, restraining the PSD. WO1 said he did not recall hearing any conversation or commands from the SO. He added that he was close enough that he would have heard the AP if she had said anything.

WO2 told the IIO that he saw the SO in the ditch beside the road, and saw him deploy the PSD on a leash. He said he then heard a female voice coming from the wooded area, saying something to the effect of "I'm pregnant, I give up. When he shone his flashlight in that direction, he said, he saw the SO, the PSD and the AP about 20 metres into the wooded area. As he and WO1 climbed up the slope, he said, he heard the SO telling the AP not to hit the dog. He said the PSD was "off" the AP, barking, and was being restrained by the SO. WO2 recalled that the AP appeared to have a dog bite injury on her right buttock.

WO1 said that he immediately used his radio and called for paramedics to attend, then handcuffed the AP. He and WO2 lifted her up and helped her down to the road. The AP was left, handcuffed, in the back of a police vehicle until an ambulance arrived, about 40 minutes after it was summoned. The ambulance crew had difficulty locating the incident scene because of a technical malfunction in the system generating a location "ping."

Interviewed by the IIO, the AP recalled driving north on Highway 99 in a Nissan Frontier that was owned or had been borrowed by a "buddy." She said she stopped in an area where there were trees, rocks and scrub. Even though she said she was not aware that the police were coming or nearby, she said she was scared as she has a "bad history" with police, so she got out of the truck and walked up the hill beside the highway for about 20 seconds and hid behind a shrub, lying down. She said that it was dark, and that she would not have been visible from the road, though from her account it appears she could see the road.

The AP recalled that an officer (WO1) pulled up behind the Nissan and looked around with a flashlight. A little later, she said, she saw WO2 arrive, and then the SO with his PSD. She said that the three officers came up the slope toward her, together, with the dog about a foot ahead of the SO.

The AP said that she told the officers, loudly and clearly, that she was giving up. She said she sat up with her hands by her sides. She said the three officers approached to about six feet from her, with a clear view of her, and the SO then set the dog on her. The AP said she rolled over from the seated position and lay on her stomach, and the dog bit her on her right buttock or thigh.

The AP said that the SO then jumped onto her back, grabbed her head and slammed it into the rocks, saying, "Stop stealing vehicles." She said the SO told her, "When you stop screaming, I'll let my dog off of you." The AP said that it sounded like the SO was using German commands to instruct the dog to "hold and not let go." The other two officers, she said, were just standing watching.

The AP said that when the SO released the PSD from her, he went back down to the road and put the dog away in his car. She was then handcuffed by the witness officers and helped down the slope, despite telling them that she could not walk, and was then left to “bleed out” in the back of a police vehicle. She said that one of the officers asked her if she thought she needed an ambulance, and she said she did, but none of the officers gave her any first aid before paramedics arrived.

Hospital records indicate information from the AP that:

she had been drinking with a friend and although she was unable to recall specifics, could remember running through the woods when she was attacked by the dog. She states that the police officer knelt on her low back to put her under arrest.

The AP was treated for a serious dog bite injury. There is no indication in the AP’s medical records that she suffered any injury to her head or face consistent with being being struck against rocks.

ANALYSIS

The Independent Investigations Office of British Columbia is mandated to investigate any incident that occurs in the province in which an Affected Person has died or suffered serious physical harm and there appears to be a connection to the actions (or sometimes inaction) of police. The aim is to provide assurance to the public that when the investigation is complete, they can trust the IIO’s conclusions, because the investigation was conducted by an independent, unbiased, civilian-led agency.

In the majority of cases, those conclusions are presented in a public report such as this one, which completes the IIO’s mandate by explaining to the public what happened in the incident and how the Affected Person came to suffer harm. Such reports are generally intended to enhance public confidence in the police and in the justice system as a whole through a transparent and impartial evaluation of the incident and the police role in it.

In a smaller number of cases, the evidence gathered may give the Chief Civilian Director (“CCD”) reasonable grounds to believe that an officer may have committed an offence in connection with the incident. In such a case, the *Police Act* gives the CCD authority to refer the file to the BC Prosecution Service (BCPS) for consideration of charges.

In a case such as this one, involving the use of force by officers, the IIO investigators collect evidence with respect to potential justifications for that use of force. The IIO then analyzes this evidence using legal tests such as necessity, proportionality and

reasonableness to reach conclusions as to whether officers' actions were lawful, or whether an officer may have committed the offence of assault.

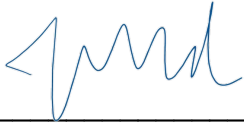
The British Columbia Provincial Policing Standards, in relation to Police Service Dogs, permit a PSD to be allowed to bite when a person is "fleeing or hiding and there are reasonable grounds for their immediate apprehension by a police dog bite." When making the decision to use the dog, the SO was required to consider a variety of other factors, including the risk to others if the AP was not apprehended and the risk to the AP if the dog was used.

There are significant differences between the account of this incident provided by the police witnesses and that given by the AP. The AP has described being approached by officers as she was clearly surrendering, and having the dog set on her for no apparent reason, after which she was allegedly seriously assaulted by the SO while the dog was still biting her. The witness officers' account, on the other hand, is of a dog being set to track and immediately and unexpectedly contacting the AP, who was hiding in the bushes.

The AP's account does not appear to be entirely reliable, as some aspects contradict each other and do not align with the objective evidence. The AP alleges she was surrendering at the time she was bitten, but her medical records indicate that she told hospital personnel she was running through the woods after drinking with a friend, and was not seated when police approached before moving to lay on her stomach as she told IIO investigators. Similarly, there is no medical evidence showing injury to the AP's face or head that would be consistent with her allegation that the SO slammed it against rocks. Lastly, while there is no objective evidence, aside from the contradictory statements provided by the AP and two witness officers, regarding how far the dog was allowed to move from the SO and the location of officers at the time the AP was bitten, it is notable that the AP's description is not consistent with standard police practice when using a PSD to track a person. Typically, a long leash would be used, with a second officer following behind for safety.

On the evidence as a whole, it is reasonable to conclude that responding officers judged they were dealing with a person on the run from a serious property offence, with unknown intentions and unknown capability to cause harm to pursuing police. Such a situation is an example of one where the deployment of a PSD to track on a long line is appropriate. That the dog may bite is an unfortunate risk in those circumstances. In this case, the timing of radio transmissions indicates that the track had barely begun when the AP was contacted by the dog, and that the SO moved in quickly and appropriately restrained the dog. There is no reliable evidence that any unjustifiable force was used by any officer.

Accordingly, as Chief Civilian Director of the IIO, I do not consider that there are reasonable grounds to believe that an officer may have committed an offence under any enactment and the matter will not be referred to the BCPS for consideration of charges.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Berglund', positioned above a horizontal line.

Jessica Berglund
Chief Civilian Director

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