

S.119

An act relating to a statewide use of deadly force policy for law enforcement

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. 20 V.S.A. § 2368 is added to read:

§ 2368. STATEWIDE POLICY; LAW ENFORCEMENT USE OF DEADLY FORCE

(a) Definitions. As used in this section:

(1) “Deadly force” means any use of force that creates a substantial risk of causing death or serious bodily injury.

(2) “Imminent threat of death or serious bodily injury” means when, based on the totality of the circumstances, a reasonable officer in the same situation would believe that a person has the present ability, opportunity, and apparent intent to immediately cause death or serious bodily injury to the law enforcement officer or another person. An imminent harm is not merely a fear of future harm, no matter how great the fear and no matter how great the likelihood of the harm, but is one that, from appearances, must be instantly confronted and addressed.

(3) “Law enforcement officer” shall have the same meaning as in 20 V.S.A. § 2351a.

(4) “Prohibited restraint” means the use of any maneuver on a person that applies pressure to the neck, throat, windpipe, or carotid artery that may prevent or hinder breathing, reduce intake of air, or impede the flow of blood or oxygen to the brain.

(5) “Totality of the circumstances” means all facts known to the law enforcement officer at the time, including the conduct of the officer and the words and conduct of the subject leading up to the use of deadly force.

(b) Statewide policy.

(1) The authority to use physical force is a serious responsibility that shall be exercised judiciously and with respect for human rights and dignity and for the sanctity of every human life. Every person has a right to be free from excessive use of force by officers acting under authority of the State.

(2) Law enforcement officers may use deadly force only when necessary in defense of human life. In determining whether deadly force is necessary, officers shall evaluate each situation in light of the particular circumstances of each case and shall use other available resources and techniques if reasonably safe and feasible to an objectively reasonable officer.

(3) The decision by a law enforcement officer to use force shall be evaluated carefully and thoroughly, in a manner that reflects the gravity of that authority and the serious consequences of the use of force by law enforcement

officers, in order to ensure that officers use force consistent with law and agency policies.

(4) The decision by a law enforcement officer to use force shall be evaluated from the perspective of a reasonable officer in the same situation, based on the totality of the circumstances known to or perceived by the officer at the time.

(5) Any law enforcement officer who has reasonable cause to believe that the person to be arrested has committed a crime may use proportional force if necessary to effect the arrest, to prevent escape, or to overcome resistance.

(c) Use of deadly force.

(1) A law enforcement officer is justified in using deadly force upon another person only when the officer reasonably believes, based on the totality of the circumstances, that such force is necessary to:

(A) defend against an imminent threat of death or serious bodily injury to the officer or to another person; or

(B) apprehend a fleeing person for any felony that threatened or resulted in death or serious bodily injury if the officer reasonably believes that the person will cause death or serious bodily injury to another unless immediately apprehended.

(2) When feasible, a law enforcement officer shall, prior to the use of force, make reasonable efforts to identify himself or herself as a law enforcement officer and to warn that deadly force may be used.

(3) A law enforcement officer shall not use deadly force against a person based on the danger that person poses to himself or herself, if an objectively reasonable officer would believe the person does not pose an imminent threat of death or serious bodily injury to the law enforcement officer or to another person.

(4) A law enforcement officer who makes or attempts to make an arrest need not retreat or desist from his or her efforts by reason of the resistance or threatened resistance of the person being arrested. A law enforcement officer shall not be deemed an aggressor or lose the right to self-defense by the use of proportional force if necessary in compliance with subdivision (b)(5) of this section to effect the arrest or to prevent escape or to overcome resistance. For the purposes of this subdivision, "retreat" does not mean tactical repositioning or other de-escalation tactics.

(5) A law enforcement officer shall not use a prohibited restraint on a person for any reason. A law enforcement officer has a duty to intervene when the officer observes another officer using a prohibited restraint on a person.

Sec. 2. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on October 1, 2020.