

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLORADO**

Civil Action No.

STEPHAN LONG,

Plaintiff,

v.

DANIEL MEADOWS, individually;
ADAM LUCERO, individually; and
CITY AND COUNTY OF DENVER, COLORADO, a municipality,

Defendants.

CIVIL RIGHTS COMPLAINT AND JURY DEMAND

Plaintiff, by and through his attorney, Zachary D. Warren of HIGHLANDS LAW FIRM, hereby submits this Civil Rights Complaint and Jury Demand and alleges the following:

I. INTRODUCTION

1. On June 13, 2023, Stephan Long was driving northbound on I-25 in his vehicle. His wife and children – a newborn and a toddler – were driving separately in a car right behind him. As they began exiting I-25 via the offramp, a vehicle aggressively cut him off, pinning his car in traffic with no way to flee. An unknown assailant, after very briefly rummaging through the back seat of his vehicle (presumably for a weapon), exited the passenger side of his car wearing a black gloves, and began violently assaulting Stephan Long through his open window—punching, choking, and grabbing Mr. Long—all within the span of a few seconds.

2. In reasonable fear for his life and safety (and that of his family in the car immediately behind him), with no opportunity to escape, and having exhausted every other available option to fend off the assailant, Mr. Long grabbed his lawfully-possessed firearm and made the devastating but necessary decision to defend himself and his family—firing at the attacker.

3. As this violent assault was taking place, a second assailant—the driver of the car that had Mr. Long and his family pinned down—quickly exited his vehicle, while also donning black gloves, and rushed towards Mr. Long. This second unknown assailant also began violently assaulting Mr. Long—punching him, grabbing him, pulling at the wheel of his vehicle, grabbing at the keys in the ignition, and grasping for the door handle. By this time, traffic began to move ever-so-slightly, and Mr. Long attempted to drive away from the situation; sadly, the second assailant grabbed onto the driver-side window and continued his assault as Mr. Long tried to flee—punching, grabbing the wheel, and trying to forcibly open the driver’s side door.

4. Again, in reasonable fear for his life and safety, and without any other means of escaping this shocking and violent assault, Mr. Long made the heart-wrenching but lawful decision to defend himself—firing at the second assailant.

5. Both assailants tragically died because of these injuries.

6. In both instances, Mr. Long lawfully defended himself from assailants who posed an obvious risk of serious bodily injury or death—to himself, to his wife, and to his two young children, who watched in horror from mere feet away.

7. But because Mr. Long is a young Black man, the Denver Police Department, including Defendants Lucero and Meadows, were intent on facilitating his prosecution—part of a broader and well-documented problem in Denver.

8. The racial disparity related to this baseless prosecution were obvious to members of the community, including members of Denver City Council and several highly-regarded community organizations, which courageously highlighted the double-standard applied to Black men who dare to defend themselves from attack in Denver.

9. After a roughly 14-month-long ordeal, which caused irreparable harm to Mr. Long and his family, the charges were ultimately dismissed.

10. This lawsuit seeks accountability from Denver and the Individual Defendants who facilitated Mr. Long’s prolonged prosecution—a process that targeted an innocent man who lawfully defended himself and his family.

II. JURISDICTION AND VENUE

11. This action arises under the Constitution and laws of the United States, including, 42 U.S.C. § 1983, 1988, and the laws of the State of Colorado, including Colo. Const. Art. VI, § 9(1), and Colo. Rev. Stat. 13-1-124.

12. Jurisdiction is conferred upon this Court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331 and 1343 relative to the federal claims. Jurisdiction for the supplemental state law claims is conferred upon this Court by 27 U.S.C. § 1367.

13. Venue is proper within the District of Colorado pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b) because all of the events giving rise to the claims in this matter occurred within the District of Colorado.

III. PARTIES

14. At all times relevant to this action, Plaintiff Stephan Long was an adult resident of the State of Colorado and citizen of the United States.

15. At all times relevant to this action, Defendant Daniel Meadows was an adult resident of the State of Colorado and a citizen of the United States. At all relevant times, Defendant Meadows was acting within the scope and course of his official duties and employment and under color of state law in his capacity as a law enforcement officer at the Denver Police Department. Defendant Meadows is a peace officer employed by a local government, and, therefore, is subject to suit under C.R.S. § 13-21-131.

16. At all times relevant to this action, Defendant Adam Lucero was an adult resident of the State of Colorado and a citizen of the United States. At all relevant times, Defendant Lucero was acting within the scope and course of his official duties and employment and under color of state law in his capacity as a law enforcement officer at the Denver Police Department. Defendant Lucero is a peace officer employed by a local government, and, therefore, is subject to suit under C.R.S. § 13-21-131.

17. Defendants Meadows and Lucero collectively are referred to herein as the “Individual Defendants.”

18. Defendant City and County of Denver, Colorado (“Denver”) is a Colorado municipal corporation. Denver is a “person” subject to suit under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

19. The Denver Police Department (“Denver Police” or “DPD”) is a department of Denver.

IV. FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

The Plaintiff Was Violently Assaulted by Two Unknown Assailants and Reasonably Feared for His Life

20. On June 13, 2023, the Plaintiff was driving his vehicle on Interstate 25 in Denver, Colorado, after signing a lease agreement for a new apartment with his wife and two young children.

21. The Plaintiff drove separately from his wife and children.

22. After leaving the new apartment complex, and while working their way through heavy traffic on northbound I-25, the Plaintiff called his wife to see if she needed him to make a stop and pick up anything for her or for their children on his way home.

23. While they were talking on the phone, a car with two unknown men, seemingly agitated that the Plaintiff and his wife were driving too slowly, aggressively pulled alongside the Plaintiff and seemed to be yelling in his direction.

24. At this point, the Plaintiff and his wife were planning on taking the exit at 8th Avenue while driving northbound on I-25 to visit a family member who lived in that area of Denver.

25. Because the driver in the unknown vehicle was driving erratically and aggressively, and the passenger appeared to be yelling towards the Plaintiff and his wife, the Plaintiff's wife slowed down to create some distance—allowing the Plaintiff to safely merge in front of her.

26. At no point did the Plaintiff threaten or attempt to provoke the unknown individuals during this period; instead, he had every intention of creating space between himself and the individuals in the unknown vehicle and exiting I-25 at the 8th Avenue offramp.

27. As the Plaintiff approached his exit, he utilized his turn signal and began to pull off of I-25 and onto the exit ramp at 8th Avenue. At this time, there was significant traffic, most individuals in traffic were driving reasonably, and there was a line of traffic stopped on the offramp leading to 8th Avenue.

28. Right as the Plaintiff (and his wife in the car behind him) began to exit I-25 and merge onto the offramp, the individuals in the unknown car in front of them aggressively swerved over in front of the Plaintiff and slammed on the brakes—coming to a screeching halt on the offramp.

29. Were it not for this aggressive and erratic driving maneuver, the Plaintiff would have had ample space between his vehicle and the traffic stopped in front of him. But because of the last-minute and aggressive driving maneuver by the unknown car, he was essentially stuck—forcing him to hit the brakes and avoid colliding with the unknown vehicle in front of him.

30. Aware that the individuals in front of him had been acting aggressively (and considering that his wife and very young children were in the car behind him), the Plaintiff closely watched as the unknown vehicle came to a screeching halt.

31. He observed the individual on the passenger side very briefly rummage through the back seat (and back floorboard), pull his hoodie over his head, manipulate something in his hands, and then throw open the passenger side door.

32. At this point, the Plaintiff had a clear view of a large individual, dressed in all black, wearing black gloves, with his hood partially obscuring his head and face, who was sprinting towards the driver-side door of the Plaintiff's car—which happened to have the window open.

33. Importantly, because of the erratic and aggressive way the unknown vehicle swerved in front of the Plaintiff before slamming on the brakes, coupled with the traffic which had come to a complete stop on the 8th Avenue offramp, it was impossible for the Plaintiff to move his vehicle. He was obstructed from moving forward, there was no way to maneuver around sitting traffic—he was stuck. Nor did he have any time to roll up his window.

34. As the first assailant sprinted towards his driver-side window, the Plaintiff reached to the back seat of his car to grab a backpack, which contained his lawfully possessed firearm.

35. Before ever using a firearm, the Plaintiff was intent on using every other available means to protect himself while also assessing risks to himself and his family.

36. Once the first assailant reached the driver-side door, he immediately began violently assaulting the Plaintiff through open window—repeatedly and viciously punching the Plaintiff in the head, neck, throat, and shoulder. The assailant used his other hand to grab the Plaintiff's clothes near his chest, while using the free hand to land numerous punches, and preventing the Plaintiff from successfully pulling away or creating space.

37. After unleashing a barrage of closed-fist punches to the head, neck, throat, and shoulder of the Plaintiff, the assailant began attempting to enter the vehicle by opening the door from the inside.

38. At this point, the Plaintiff was buckled into the vehicle, unable to drive away, unable to escape the barrage of punches, unable to create space or retreat, and there was no sign that the assault would end until the Plaintiff was gravely injured, killed, or the assailant succeeded in entering (and potentially stealing) the vehicle.

39. This happened very, very quickly given that the attackers' car was parked immediately in front of the Plaintiff and the first assailant literally sprinted directly back to the Plaintiff's driver-side window.

40. With nowhere to flee, unable to escape the flurry of punches, and thinking that the assailant may also be armed, the Plaintiff made the gut-wrenching decision to reach for his firearm, primarily in hopes that the sight of his firearm would deter the assailant and hopefully end the violent assault.

41. Instead, when the assailant saw the firearm, he began alternately punching the Plaintiff in the face and neck while also attempting to take the firearm. This was further evidence that the Plaintiff's life was in danger—and that of his wife and children behind him.

42. At this point, the Plaintiff shot the first assailant.

43. Immediately afterwards, the Plaintiff turned his attention to the driver of the unknown vehicle, who was out of the car and rushing towards the Plaintiff—also wearing a black hoodie and gloves.

44. In both instances, the Plaintiff reasonably perceived that the assailants' black gloves were a clear indication that the assailants were determined to use violence and cause as much harm as possible—both to himself and potentially his family immediately behind him.

45. The second assailant began immediately assaulting the Plaintiff the moment he reached the driver-side window. As with the previous assailant, he was using his gloved hand to throw closed-fist punches to the head, neck, and throat of the Plaintiff.

46. Again, the Plaintiff tried everything in his power to resist the assailant, attempting to fend him off and push him away. But the assailant was undeterred.

47. Finally, the traffic which had previously boxed-in the Plaintiff began to move forward just a few feet, providing a potential avenue of escape for the Plaintiff.

48. As a last resort, the Plaintiff stepped on the gas pedal, swerved around the assailant's car—going slightly off the road—and accelerated towards the intersection with 8th Avenue at the end of the offramp. This maneuver was designed to escape the assailant's grasp, de-escalate the situation, and to create a safe distance from which he could check on his wife and children and report the violent assaults.

49. The second assailant, seemingly undeterred, grabbed on to the driver-side door, at times flailing around to grab the Plaintiff's body, the steering wheel, and grasping at the door handle on the inside of the driver-side door.

50. The Plaintiff unsuccessfully attempted to push the second assailant away from the window area; however, nothing was working as the assailant attempted to pull the Plaintiff out of his vehicle before then pulling himself through the window as if he were getting into the vehicle.

51. Having exhausted all other available options, and in fear for his life, the Plaintiff again made the gut-wrenching decision to use his firearm, shooting the second assailant, who finally fell from the driver-side window.

52. Throughout this series of events, the assailants behaved erratically, instigated the entire incident, demonstrated a clear intention to use unrestrained violence, violently and mercilessly assaulted the Plaintiff, and were relentless in their pursuit of the Plaintiff.

53. The Plaintiff was in fear for his life. The Plaintiff did not know who the men were, what kind of weapons they were armed with, if they were going to kill him, kill his family, or if they were going to steal his vehicle.

54. The Plaintiff reasonably and emphatically believed that if he did not take action to defend himself, the men were going to kill him.

55. Tragically, both assailants ultimately died from their wounds.

56. Parts of this ordeal were witnessed by an off-duty officer who communicated the incident to emergency services.

The Individual Defendants Targeted the Plaintiff for Prosecution and Consistently and Systematically Ignored or Omitted the Overwhelming and Uncontroverted Evidence of His Innocence Throughout the Process

57. Denver Police Department (“DPD”) officers Phillip Brown, Defendant Daniel Meadows, and Todd Cole, stopped the Plaintiff in his vehicle a few blocks away.

58. Defendant Meadows arrived on scene shortly contemporaneously.

59. The Plaintiff complied with every order given to him while being held at gunpoint from multiple directions. Defendant Meadows noted the Plaintiff’s compliance and thanked him.

60. The Plaintiff was taken to the back of a police car in handcuffs and was locked inside.

61. After roughly seven minutes, Defendant Meadows opened the door of the police car and began to question the Plaintiff, who remained in handcuffs. At no point during this interaction did Defendant Meadows advise the Plaintiff of his *Miranda* rights.

62. The Plaintiff was transported to DPD headquarters by Defendant Meadows and placed in a holding cell.

63. The Plaintiff was later taken to an interview room, where DPD Detective Adam Lucero interviewed him.

64. A few minutes after entering the room, Defendant Lucero attempted to advise the Plaintiff of his *Miranda* rights. During the reading of the advisement, the Plaintiff asked Defendant Lucero if he was under arrest. Defendant Lucero replied, “Well you’re being detained pending investigation.”

65. The Plaintiff initialed the advisement form. Then, suddenly, Defendant Lucero told the Plaintiff that he was not free to leave.

66. Defendant Lucero asked the Plaintiff if he wished to voluntarily speak. The Plaintiff responded that he wanted to talk, but wanted to have somebody present. The Plaintiff began to request that a lawyer be present but was interrupted by Defendant Lucero, who told the Plaintiff that they could talk and stop the interview at any time.

67. The Plaintiff expressed confusion but desired to set the record straight. The Plaintiff was calm and cooperative as he explained that this was his first “go around with all this,” meaning that the Plaintiff had never been interrogated by police before.

68. After Defendant Lucero pressured the Plaintiff a third time to voluntarily speak with him, the Plaintiff continued asking questions about his *Miranda* rights. The Plaintiff reluctantly signed the advisement form.

69. Defendant Lucero purposely and expertly exploited the Plaintiff to try and extract an incriminating statement—consistently brushing aside all of the exculpatory information provided during the interview.

70. The Plaintiff was cooperative and calm as he spoke to Defendant Lucero about the events that unfolded. The Plaintiff explained that he was in fear for his life and felt that if he didn’t act, the men would continue assaulting him or worse, kill him.

71. The Plaintiff explained that the men were the initial aggressors, and that he did not seek them out nor physically engage them. Rather, the Plaintiff was the victim of their violent and aggressive assaults which caused him to fear for his own life.

72. Several bystanders were also brought to DPD headquarters for questioning. The bystanders relayed that they witnessed the two men get out of their vehicle and violently assault the Plaintiff in his vehicle. At no point in time did any witness make a statement indicating the Plaintiff was the aggressor; instead, each of the eyewitnesses consistently described a scenario in which the Plaintiff was clearly the victim of a horrifying and ruthless violent assault.

73. Despite overwhelming evidence, including the Plaintiff's testimony and the testimony of several bystanders, the Plaintiff was charged with two counts of first-degree murder.

74. Defendant Daniel Meadows, an officer employed by DPD, issued a probable cause statement for the two first-degree murder charges.

75. Defendant Meadows' statement ignored substantial evidence which confirmed the third-party eyewitness accounts—that the Plaintiff acted in lawful self-defense.

76. Defendant Meadows, in concert with Defendant Adam Lucero, initiated the prosecution of the Plaintiff for the first-degree murders of Blake and Damon Lucas. The Defendants initiated the prosecution knowing that they did not have probable cause to believe that the Plaintiff murdered the assailants. Instead, they allowed racial bias and stereotyping to permeate their decision-making, acting under the misguided assumption that a Black man who shoots two white men must have done so without any legal justification.

77. Tellingly, in a later suppression hearing during the Plaintiff's prosecution, Defendant Meadows utilized the terms "perpetrator" and an "inmate" while describing the Plaintiff

and circumstances surrounding the incident, notwithstanding the fact that the Plaintiff remained innocent unless proven guilty under the law. The Plaintiff was neither a perpetrator nor an inmate—but this is how DPD and the Individual Defendants treat Black men who are simply attempting to defend themselves.

78. This is but one example of the type of bias which pervades the Denver system, and which infected the Individual Defendants, who saw a Black man act in obvious self-defense yet immediately targeted him as a perpetrator and seemed intent on facilitating a conviction despite the overwhelming evidence of his innocence.

79. The probable cause statement authored by Defendant Meadows made no mention of the Plaintiff's testimony regarding his fear for his life and bodily safety. The statement also made no mention of the fact that the second assailant attempted to drag the Plaintiff out of his vehicle and repeatedly punched him. Overall, Defendant Meadows' statement omitted several key pieces of information which would have placed two first-degree murder charges completely outside the realm of reality. All of this information contradicts the knowingly false narrative advanced by the Defendants and are material omissions which show that there was no probable cause to believe that the Plaintiff murdered Blake and Damon Lucas.

80. The Plaintiff was incarcerated for approximately four months at the Denver Detention Center and afterwards was placed on house arrest for ten months.

81. The Plaintiff was isolated away from his wife, his two young children, his family, his friends, and his community. He lost his job, his income, and his freedom because of Defendant Meadows' misleading probable cause statement and Defendant Lucero's botched investigation.

82. The Plaintiff had to file multiple emergency motions to travel with his wife and young child to the hospital while his infant child experienced a serious medical emergency.

Denver City Council and Community Leaders Recognized the Obvious Racial Double Standard Applied to the Plaintiff

83. Advocates and family members shared their concerns about the charges, and the role that racial bias played into the charging decision, in addition to the overall length of the prosecution, on multiple occasions.

84. At a Denver City Council meeting, family members and advocates shared testimony regarding similarly-situated White individuals who were never charged for any kind of offense. These courageous advocates demanded answers as to why a young Black man who acted in lawful self-defense was presumed to be a murderer.

85. In an unprecedented act of political and moral courage, the Denver City Council expressed concern about the double standard that existed in the decision to charge and prosecute the Plaintiff, a young Black man, but not a white man named Jack Reed.

86. In an open letter addressed to Beth McCann, the Denver District Attorney, on October 9, 2023, and signed by eleven City Councilmembers, the Denver City Council wrote “...we cannot help but be struck by a seeming double standard in hearing the public information about the charges you have filed against Stephan Long and the charges you did not file against Jack Reed. Both claimed self-defense. Both appear to have had legal and registered firearms and claimed self-defense fearing their life was in danger in the use of their firearm. Yet they have been treated in drastically different ways.” Furthermore, the City Council wrote, “We are confused and concerned if Mr. Reed, a White man, can avoid charges for the murder of a child by claiming self-defense after he created a volatile situation by ignoring guidance from 911 operators and pursuing

a vehicle with his personal gun in hand – but Mr. Long, a Black man, will face charges for shooting two masked attackers who had him physically trapped.”¹

87. The 11 signatories from City Council were referencing an incident that occurred in Denver on February 5, 2023, in which a White man named Jack Reed tracked down his vehicle after it was stolen using a GPS app he had installed on his phone. Rather than allow police to conduct their own investigation and apprehension of the suspect, Mr. Reed took matters into his own hands by tracking down and approaching his stolen vehicle, firing inside at the individual, and killing the driver, a Black 12-year-old child named Elias Armstrong. Importantly, Mr. Reed was on the phone with dispatchers throughout this ordeal, who implored him to cease his pursuit, avoid using force, and allow law enforcement to pursue the stole vehicle. Mr. Reed ignored these requests, sought out a confrontation with the individual who stole the car, and proceeded to shoot him to death shortly thereafter.

88. The Denver DA’s Office, through Beth McCann and acting in concert with DPD, chose not to file criminal charges against Mr. Reed, stating “we cannot file charges because of self-defense issues which were present at the time.”

89. Shortly after receiving the Denver City Council’s letter, on October 18, 2023, the Denver DA’s Office dismissed one of the Plaintiff’s first-degree murder charges due to insufficient evidence.

90. However, the Plaintiff continued to face a remaining first-degree murder charge and continued confinement.

¹ A copy of this open letter is attached as Exhibit 1 and incorporated into this Complaint as if fully set forth herein.

91. This is part of the broader theme, outlined in more detail below, of Denver using the weight of pending charges to secure a guilty plea, even knowing that there is insufficient evidence to support the charge—an attempt to save face for wrongfully targeting Black individuals, and especially those who use lawful means of self-defense.

92. The weight of being accused a murderer and the deprivation of his freedom had lasting emotional and financial impacts on the Plaintiff and his family.

93. Several courageous advocacy groups, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (“NAACP”) and Denver Justice Project, called out the racial disparity in the charging and continued prosecution of Black individuals as opposed to their similarly situated white counterparts.

94. In June 2024, NAACP Rocky Mountain Region President Portia Prescott and Vice President Rashad Younger articulated the key issue in this matter: “When we look at this system, they do not want Black men to defend themselves.”

95. As the Plaintiff prepared for trial on the remaining first-degree murder charge, the Denver DA’s Office suddenly dismissed the charge on August 22, 2024, for lack of sufficient evidence.

96. To be clear, there was no material new evidence obtained between the early stages of the investigation—which included dozens of reports, witness interviews, and hours upon hours of body cam footage—and the dismissal of the initial murder charge, which took many months.

97. Moreover, and perhaps even more egregiously, there was absolutely no new material evidence between the dismissal of the initial murder charge and the second charge—over a year later.

98. When the second charge was finally dismissed, the Denver DA's Office issued a statement noting what had been evident since the very beginning: ***"The evidence establishes a strong and valid self-defense claim pursuant to Colorado law."***

99. For over a year, the Plaintiff had his freedom taken away from him, was labeled a murderer, and feared his children growing up without their father present due to this selective prosecution.

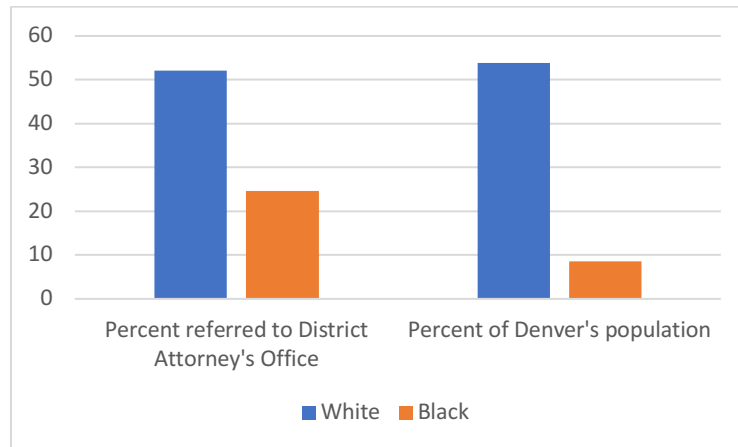
100. Throughout the ordeal, the uncontroverted and overwhelming evidence established a strong and valid self-defense claim, but Denver and the Individual Defendants nevertheless relentlessly pursued charges against the Plaintiff despite "strong and valid" evidence that he was not guilty.

The Targeted Prosecution Against the Plaintiff is Part of a Much Broader Failure on the Part of Denver

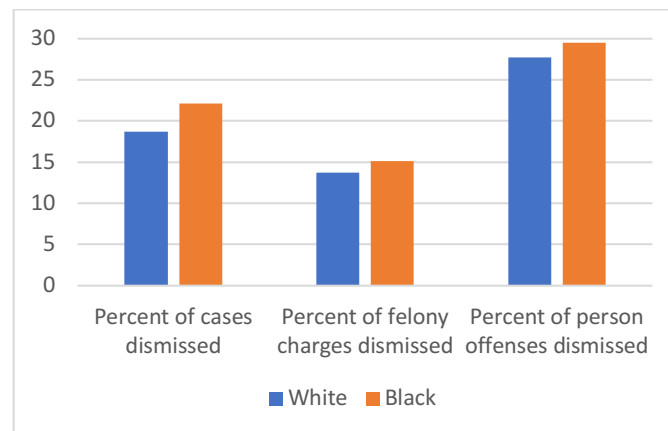
101. These failures are emblematic of a broader problem regarding racial bias when it comes to targeting Black men in Denver.

102. According to data compiled and published by the Denver DA's Office, Black individuals in Denver are unjustly targeted by the Denver Police Department across nearly every domain of the criminal justice process, beginning with initial referrals to prosecutors all the way through the length of time Black individuals spend in the system before the cases are resolved in their favor.

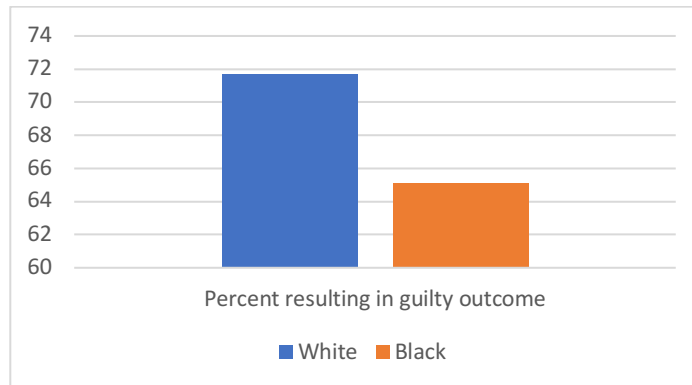
103. By way of example, Black individuals make up just 8.9% of Denver's population, yet they make up 24.6% of referrals from DPD to the Denver District Attorney's Office, which reflects the fact that the Black community is disproportionately targeted by law enforcement:



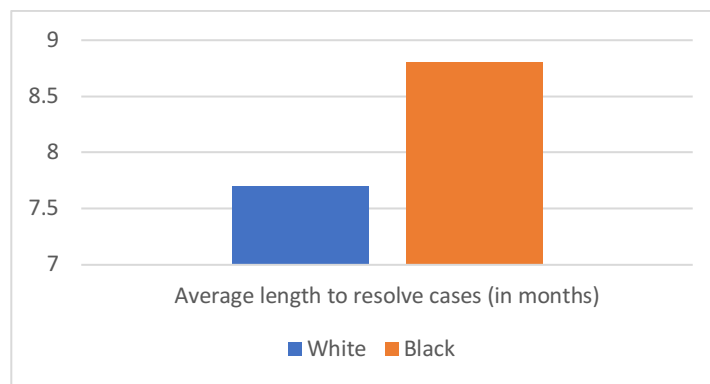
104. At the same time, Black individuals are more likely to receive dismissals from the Denver DA's Office regardless of charge level or type of offense, more likely to receive dismissals of felony charges, and are more likely to receive dismissals of offenses against persons than their white counterparts.



105. Black individuals are also less likely to be convicted or plead guilty than white individuals.



106. Even though they are more likely to result in dismissal, cases involving Black individuals still take longer to resolve than those involving White individuals.



107. The data establishes that Black individuals are more likely to be targeted by DPD but these arrests and referrals are less likely to have merit. Instead, Black individuals, including the Plaintiff, must bear the weight of a system in Denver that is used as a cudgel rather than a system of criminal justice that provides equal protection under the law.

108. The fact that a disproportionate percentage of cases against Black individuals, including the Plaintiff, are eventually dismissed for a lack of sufficient evidence is not a victory for Denver—it is a failure.

Denver and the Individual Defendants Targeted the Plaintiff for Selective Prosecution and Violated his Constitutional Rights Consistent with Denver's Broader Failures in Training, Supervision, and Discipline

109. The Plaintiff's case is an illustration of these broader failures converging into a single case study: it was evident that the Plaintiff acted in self-defense, yet Defendants Meadows and Lucero, individually and in concert with one another and the prosecutors on the case, set off a chain of events which culminated in the Plaintiff's roughly 14-month prosecution for two first-degree murder charges.

110. The probable cause statement and investigation by Defendants Meadows and Lucero were improperly influenced by racial bias regarding the criminal intent of the Plaintiff, a young Black man, and were an unlawful violation of the Plaintiff's right to be free from selective law enforcement under the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution.

111. As well, the continued prosecution and confinement of the Plaintiff for 14 months, when the Individual Defendants knew it did not possess sufficient evidence to back up the first-degree murder charges, was unlawful and a violation of the Plaintiff's right to be free from selective law enforcement under the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution.

112. Denver and the Individual Defendants should have quickly ascertained, based on the available evidence, that the Plaintiff was acting in self-defense, yet allowed biases about the Plaintiff's race to improperly influence the decision to continue to pursue two first-degree murder charges.

113. Even if Denver and the Individual Defendants needed time to ascertain that Plaintiff acted in self-defense, 14 months is far too long and evidences a racial bias in continued prosecution, particularly given the data compiled and published by the Denver DA's Office.

114. Where white individuals like Jack Reed are credited with acting in self-defense *despite* the available evidence showing otherwise, Black individuals, including the Plaintiff, who are otherwise similarly-situated, are assumed to have committed premeditated murder, even where the available evidence makes clear that such charges are not warranted.

115. In this case, the Plaintiff suffered severe emotional, reputational, and financial harms, including: the loss of his freedom for fourteen months, the loss of his employment and income, and the deprivation of his constitutional rights to be free from selective prosecution pursuant to the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

116. Similarly, Defendants Meadows and Lucero had a duty to not violate the Plaintiff's clearly established right to be free from selective prosecution, yet set off a chain of events based on misleading, inaccurate, and deliberately false information which formed the basis for the Denver DA Office's charging decisions.

V. CLAIMS FOR RELIEF

FIRST CLAIM FOR RELIEF

42 U.S.C. § 1983

Fourteenth Amendment Violation – Selective Prosecution

(Plaintiff Against All Defendants)

117. Plaintiff hereby incorporates all other paragraphs of this Civil Rights Complaint and Jury Demand as if fully set forth herein.

118. Individual Defendants acted under color of state law, and within the course and scope of their employment, in their capacities as law enforcement officers at all times relevant to the allegations in this Civil Rights Complaint and Jury Demand.

119. Defendants are “persons” under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

120. Individual Defendants initiated charges and took other actions against the Plaintiff knowing that there was no basis for those charges or probable cause to believe that Plaintiff committed first-degree, premeditated murder.

121. No probable cause supported the Plaintiff's original arrest or prosecution absent the affirmative efforts of the Individual Defendants who insisted on targeting the Plaintiff, omitting or ignoring material (and exculpatory) facts which were a causal factor in both the charging decision and subsequent 14-month-long prosecution.

122. Individual Defendants knew there was no probable cause to support the Plaintiff's arrest or prosecution. Defendants' motivation in prosecuting the Plaintiff was not to bring to justice a person thought to have committed a crime, but rather was based on stereotypes about the criminality of young Black men, particularly those who defend themselves using lawful means, up to and including the use of lethal force.

123. Individual Defendants acted with malice in initiating the charges and taking other actions against the Plaintiff, thereby causing his continued prosecution even after it was abundantly clear that proving the criminal charges against him were impossible.

124. Individual Defendants engaged in the above actions and omissions intentionally, knowingly, maliciously, wantonly, and in reckless disregard of the Plaintiff's federally protected rights.

125. Individual Defendants' conduct violated clearly established rights belonging to the Plaintiff of which a reasonable person in their positions knew or should have known.

126. Individual The charges against the Plaintiff resulting from the actions and omissions of the Defendants described herein were dismissed; thus, the original action against the Plaintiff terminated in his favor.

127. Final policymakers and/or those who had been delegated final policymaking authority for Denver authorized the actions that violated Plaintiff's constitutional rights.

128. Defendant Denver's deficient training, supervision, and discipline caused the violation of Plaintiff's constitutional rights.

129. Defendant Denver's customs, policies, and/or practices were the moving force behind the Individual Defendants' violations of Plaintiff's constitutional rights, including, without limitation, a long-standing and demonstrable pattern of treating Black men who lawfully defend themselves from threats to personal safety or property crimes differently from similarly-situated White counterparts.

130. Defendants' actions and inactions caused, directly and proximately, Plaintiff's damages, including his wrongful arrest and incarceration, by initiating and furthering a prosecution that had no chance of success—and which ignored the uncontroverted fact that he was, in fact, a victim of a violent assault and used legal means to defend both himself and his family based on his reasonable fear of death or serious bodily injury.

131. These failures are consistent with the pattern of treating Black men in Denver differently and worse than similarly-situated White men, spanning across the criminal legal system, starting with arrest and extending through needlessly lengthy prosecutions which are unfounded and ultimately dismissed as a result.

132. Defendants’ actions and inactions caused, directly and proximately, Plaintiff to suffer material and severe damages. As a legal and proximate result of the Defendants’ actions or omissions described herein, Plaintiff has suffered and continues to suffer economic damages, including financial losses, as well as loss of reputation and other mental and emotional harms and damages.

133. Additionally, as a legal and proximate result of Defendants’ actions or omissions described herein, including the decision to arrest the Plaintiff without probable cause, the Plaintiff has suffered emotional distress, humiliation, lost earnings, loss of enjoyment of life, deep sadness, anger, outrage, fear, anxiety, embarrassment, and other significant injuries, damages, and losses.

SECOND CLAIM FOR RELIEF²
C.R.S. § 13-21-131
Colo. Const. Art. II, Section 25
Selective Prosecution – Denial of Equal Protection
(Plaintiff Against Defendants Meadows and Lucero)

134. Plaintiff hereby incorporates all other paragraphs of this Civil Rights Complaint and Jury Demand as if fully set forth herein.

135. Defendants acted under color of state law, and within the course and scope of their employment, in their capacities as law enforcement officers at all times relevant to the allegations in this Civil Rights Complaint and Jury Demand.

136. Defendants are “peace officers” under C.R.S. § 24-31-901(3) employed by a local government and therefore subject to C.R.S. § 13-21-131.

² Plaintiff brings this claim in good-faith and for the express purpose of extending and/or modifying existing precedent relating to C.R.S. § 13-21-131.

137. Plaintiff has a protected interest under the Colorado Constitution to enjoy equal protection of the laws, including the right to be free from racial discrimination in actions by law enforcement officers.

138. Defendants acted with the purpose of depriving the Plaintiff of the equal protection and benefits of the law, and equal privileges and immunities under the law, in violation of the Colorado Constitution, Article II, § 25.

139. The Plaintiff identifies as Black and is identifiable by his appearance as Black.

140. Plaintiff's race was a motivating factor in the Defendants' actions and inactions to investigate and issue a probable cause statement for two first-degree murder charges.

141. Defendants initiated charges and took other actions against the Plaintiff, knowing that there was no basis for those charges or probable cause to believe the Plaintiff had committed any crime. Defendants were instrumental in the Plaintiff's prosecution as their actions and inactions set off a chain of events which caused the Plaintiff to be selectively prosecuted for two counts of first-degree murder.

142. No probable cause supported the Plaintiff's original prosecution.

143. Defendants knew that there was no probable cause to support the Plaintiff's arrest or prosecution. Defendants' motivation was not to bring to justice a person thought to have committed a crime, but rather was based on stereotypes about the criminality of young Black men, particularly those who use firearms.

144. Defendants acted with malice in initiating the charges and taking other actions against the Plaintiff, thereby causing his continued prosecution.

145. The Plaintiff's race was a motivating factor in the Defendants' actions and inactions as described herein.

146. The Plaintiff was treated less favorably than similarly-situated White counterparts, wholly or in part because the Plaintiff is Black.

147. The charges against the Plaintiff resulting from the actions and omissions of the Defendants described herein were dismissed under circumstances indicating innocence; thus, the original action against the Plaintiff terminated in his favor.

148. Defendants' conduct was motivated by evil motive or intent and/or involved reckless or callous indifference to the Plaintiff's protected rights.

149. There was no rational basis for Defendants' discriminatory actions, let alone a purpose narrowly-tailored to serve a compelling governmental interest.

150. The Defendants did not act upon a good faith and reasonable belief that their actions and inactions, improperly based on racial bias, were lawful.

151. Defendants' actions and inactions caused, directly and proximately, Plaintiff to suffer material and severe damages. As a legal and proximate result of the Defendants' actions or omissions described herein, Plaintiff has suffered and continues to suffer economic damages, including financial losses, as well as loss of reputation and other mental and emotional harms and damages.

152. Additionally, as a legal and proximate result of Defendants' actions or omissions described herein, including the decision to arrest the Plaintiff without probable cause, the Plaintiff has suffered emotional distress, humiliation, lost earnings, loss of enjoyment of life, deep sadness, anger, outrage, fear, anxiety, embarrassment, and other significant injuries, damages, and losses.

THIRD CLAIM FOR RELIEF
42 U.S.C. § 1983
Fourth Amendment Violation – Unlawful Arrest
(Plaintiff Against All Defendants)

153. Plaintiff hereby incorporates all other paragraphs of this Complaint as if fully set forth herein.

154. Individual Defendants acted under color of state law, and within the course and scope of their employment, in their capacities as law enforcement officers at all times relevant to the allegations in this Civil Rights Complaint and Jury Demand.

155. Defendants are “persons” under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

156. The Individual Defendants did not have probable cause or any other legal basis to believe that Plaintiff had committed or was committing any violation of law prior to causing his arrest; further, the Individual Defendants, by ignoring or omitting material (and exculpatory) information, affirmatively targeted the Plaintiff for arrest, detention, and prosecution willfully and wantonly, all while knowing the Plaintiff lawfully defended himself against threats to his life and/or serious bodily injury, while a White individual under similar circumstances would have been treated differently.

157. No legally cognizable circumstances existed which justified or permitted the Individual Defendants’ conduct—it was the product of deliberation and willful and wanton disregard of the Plaintiff’s constitutional rights.

158. The actions of the Individual Defendants were objectively unreasonable in light of the circumstances confronting them.

159. The Individual Defendants acted in accordance with the policies, practices, and/or habits of Denver in targeting and unlawfully securing the arrest, detention, and prosecution of Black men, who are systematically treated differently than similarly situated White counterparts.

160. Final policymakers and/or those delegated final policymaking authority for Denver authorized or endorsed the actions that violated the Plaintiff's constitutional rights.

161. Defendant Denver deficient training, supervision, and discipline caused the violation of Plaintiff's constitutional rights.

162. Defendant Denver's customs, policies, and/or practices were the moving force behind the Individual Defendants' violations of Plaintiff's constitutional rights, including, without limitation, targeting, arresting, and charging Black men where no probable cause exists, and pursuing criminal legal action against them in furtherance of no legitimate purpose.

163. Defendants' actions and inactions caused, directly and proximately, Plaintiff to suffer material and severe damages. As a legal and proximate result of the Defendants' actions or omissions described herein, Plaintiff has suffered and continues to suffer economic damages, including financial losses, as well as loss of reputation and other mental and emotional harms and damages.

164. Additionally, as a legal and proximate result of Defendants' actions or omissions described herein, including the decision to arrest the Plaintiff without probable cause, the Plaintiff has suffered emotional distress, humiliation, lost earnings, loss of enjoyment of life, deep sadness, anger, outrage, fear, anxiety, embarrassment, and other significant injuries, damages, and losses.

FOURTH CLAIM FOR RELIEF³
C.R.S. § 13-21-131
Colo. Const. Art. II, Section 7
Unlawful Arrest
(Plaintiff Against Defendants Meadows and Lucero)

165. Plaintiff hereby incorporates all other paragraphs of this Complaint as if fully set forth herein.

166. The Individual Defendants acted under color of state law, and within the course and scope of their employment, in their capacities as law enforcement officers at all times relevant to the allegations in this Civil Rights Complaint and Jury Demand.

167. The Individual Defendants are “peace officers” under C.R.S. § 24-31-901(3) employed by a local government and therefore subject to C.R.S. § 13-21-131.

168. Plaintiff has a protected interest under the Colorado Constitution against being unlawfully arrested.

169. The Individual Defendants did not have probable cause or any other legal basis to believe that Plaintiff committed any violation of the law prior to his arrest, or during the subsequent 14-month-long prosecution, because the uncontroverted and overwhelming evidence was the Plaintiff lawfully defended himself from assailants and was acting under a reasonable fear relative to his own death (or that of his immediately family) or serious bodily injury.

170. The Individual Defendants’ actions were objectively unreasonable in light of the circumstances presented throughout their interactions with the Plaintiff and their efforts to further his prosecution.

³ Plaintiff brings this claim in good-faith and for the express purpose of extending and/or modifying existing precedent relating to C.R.S. § 13-21-131.

171. The Individual Defendants’ intentional, willful, and wanton seizure of the Plaintiff, as described herein, was solely based on Plaintiff’s identity as a Black man who defendant himself against White men, which is an impermissible basis for his arrest and subsequent prosecution.

172. The Individual Defendants’ actions and inactions, directly and proximately, caused the Plaintiff’s damages. As a legal and proximate result of the Individual Defendants’ actions and omissions described herein, including the unconstitutional custom, policy, and/or practice of treating Black men differently from similarly situated White men, particularly with respect to the right to defend oneself (including the lawful use of lethal force), Plaintiff has suffered and continues to suffer economic damages, including, without limitation, financial losses, irreparable harm to reputation, and other significant losses associated with his arrest, prosecution, and detention.

173. Plaintiff continues to be damaged by the Individual Defendants’ actions.

FIFTH CLAIM FOR RELIEF
42 U.S.C. § 1983
Fourteenth Amendment Violation – Due Process
(Plaintiff Against All Defendants)

174. Plaintiff hereby incorporates all other paragraphs of this Complaint as if fully set forth herein.

175. Individual Defendants acted under color of state law, and within the course and scope of their employment, in their capacities as law enforcement officers at all times relevant to the allegations in this Civil Rights Complaint and Jury Demand.

176. Defendants are “persons” under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

177. The Individual Defendants, as described above, and consistent with Denver’s policies, practices, and/or habits, as described throughout, acted individually and jointly to deprive Plaintiff of his constitutional right to due process.

178. The Individual Defendants targeted the Plaintiff for unlawful reasons throughout this process to further his prosecution notwithstanding the fact that they were aware, at all material times, that the uncontroverted facts revealed the Plaintiff acted in lawful self-defense.

179. Despite this knowledge, the Individual Defendants affirmatively advanced the prosecution of the Plaintiff to use the weight of the criminal legal system—including the extended detention of the Plaintiff and subsequently the onerous terms of his home confinement—to force a “guilty plea” by the Plaintiff despite a clear and obvious lack of evidence to support a guilty verdict.

180. The through-line for this unconstitutional focus on the Plaintiff by the Individual Defendants is that he was a Black man who used lethal force to lawfully defend himself; whereas, if he were a White man fending off Black assailants the Individual Defendants would not have pursued an unlawful course of action.

181. This course of conduct is consistent with the policies, practices, and/or habits of Denver, as described more fully above, which has consistently and unlawfully targeted Black men for arrest, detention, and prosecution—ignoring or omitting material (exculpatory) evidence during the course of such prosecutions that violates due process of law.

182. During the Plaintiff’s prosecution, the Individual Defendants used investigative techniques that were coercive and deceptive in an effort to elicit evidence against him, while omitting or ignoring clearly exculpatory evidence.

183. The misconduct of the Individual Defendants directly resulted in the unjust prosecution of Plaintiff, thereby denying him his constitutional right to due process and a fair trial guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. Were it not for unlawfully targeting the Plaintiff, and engaging in these coercive and abusive investigative techniques, the prosecution of Plaintiff could not and would not have been pursued.

184. The Individual Defendants subjected the Plaintiff to arbitrary governmental conduct that shocks the conscience by deliberately and intentionally pursuing criminal charges against the Plaintiff in the absence of sufficient evidence to support a conviction—and doing so based on arbitrary factors, namely, the fact that he is a Black man.

185. The misconduct of the Individual Defendants was objectively unreasonable and undertaken for unlawful purposes and with reckless and deliberate indifference to the rights of the Plaintiff.

186. The Individual Defendants' actions and/or inactions were in accordance with Denver's policies, customs, practices, and/or habits.

187. Final policymakers and/or those delegated final policymaking authority for Denver authorized or endorsed the actions that violated the Plaintiff's constitutional rights.

188. Defendant Denver's training, supervision, and discipline caused the violation of the Plaintiff's rights and were a moving force behind such violations.

189. Defendants' actions and inactions caused, directly and proximately, Plaintiff to suffer material and severe damages. As a legal and proximate result of the Defendants' actions or omissions described herein, Plaintiff has suffered and continues to suffer economic damages,

including financial losses, as well as loss of reputation and other mental and emotional harms and damages.

190. Additionally, as a legal and proximate result of Defendants' actions or omissions described herein, including the decision to target the Plaintiff for arrest and detention for unlawful reasons and without probable cause, leading to the selective prosecution claim, stated above, the Plaintiff has suffered emotional distress, humiliation, lost earnings, loss of enjoyment of life, deep sadness, anger, outrage, fear, anxiety, embarrassment, and other significant injuries, damages, and losses.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff respectfully requests that this Court enter judgment in his favor, and against the Defendants, and award all relief as allowed by law and equity as appropriate, including, without limitation, the following:

- a. Declaratory and injunctive relief;
- b. Actual economic damages as established at trial;
- c. Compensatory damages, including, without limitation, those for past and future pecuniary and non-pecuniary losses, pain and suffering, emotional distress, impairment of quality of life, reasonable and necessary medical and other expenses;
- d. Pre- and post-judgment interest at the highest lawful rate;
- e. Attorneys' fees and costs associated with this action; and
- f. Such further relief as justice requires.

PLAINTIFF DEMANDS A JURY TRIAL ON ALL ISSUES SO TRIABLE.

DATED this 11th day of June, 2025.

HIGHLANDS LAW FIRM

/s/ Zachary D. Warren

Zachary D. Warren
501 S. Cherry St.
11th Floor
Denver, Colorado 80246
(720) 722-3880 (p)
zwarren@highlandslawfirm.com

Attorney for Plaintiff



October 9, 2023

Dear District Attorney, Beth McCann,

We write you today requesting clarity. It wasn't six months ago that Council President Torres met with you and Assistant D.A. Schlager to learn more about a case in which a citizen shot and killed a 12-year-old boy who was in his stolen vehicle which he had GPS tracked to the Sun Valley Neighborhood. Your comments to me where that gun shots likely came from the stolen car first and that the citizen shot back in self-defense.

We can only imagine the difficulty you have in deliberating circumstances and cases that come before you. But we cannot help but be struck by a seeming double standard in hearing the public information about the charges you have filed against Stephan Long and the charges you did not file against Jack Reed. Both claimed self-defense. Both appear to have had legal and registered firearms and claimed self-defense fearing their life was in danger in their use of their firearm. Yet they have been treated in drastically different ways.

We have been hearing from advocates and family members about Stephan Long for several weeks in City Council's General Public Comment Session and want to ensure there isn't a double standard being exercised here. We are confused and concerned if Mr. Reed, a White man, can avoid charges for the murder of a child by claiming self-defense after he created a volatile situation by ignoring guidance from 911 operators and pursuing a vehicle with his personal gun in hand - but Mr. Long, a Black man, will face charges for shooting two masked attackers who had him physically trapped.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns,

Council President Jamie Torres, District 3

Council President Pro Tem Amanda P. Sandoval, District 1

Councilwoman Diana Romero Campbell, District 4

Councilwoman Amanda Sawyer, District 5

Councilman Paul Kashmann, District 6

Councilwoman Flor Alvidrez, District 7

Councilwoman Shontel Lewis, District 8

Councilman Darrell Watson, District 9

Councilwoman Stacie Gilmore, District 11

Councilwoman Serena Gonzales-Gutierrez, At-Large

Councilwoman Sarah Parady, At-Large

1437 Bannock St, Room 451

Denver, CO 80202

District3@denvergov.org | 720-337-3333