Dennis Kramer

Chief of Police

Burlington Police Department

201 Jefferson Street

Burlington, IA 52601

Phone Number: (319) 753-8366

Fax Number: (319) 237-8155



**CITY OF BURLINGTON OFFICIAL STATEMENT**

**SEPTEMBER 10, 2018**

Following the settlement of the Autumn Steele civil lawsuit against the City of Burlington, a federal judge ruled the police body camera video and other materials submitted as evidence should be made public. The video and other materials are related to the January 6, 2015 accidental shooting of Autumn Steele by Burlington Police Officer, Jesse Hill. The City and the Burlington Police Department believe it is important to provide a context for understanding the video and other materials.

Ms. Steele’s death was an accident caused by a series of unfortunate events.   When Officer Hill was dispatched to the scene on that January morning, he observed a domestic assault in progress.  Ms. Steele was released from jail earlier that morning following an arrest for Serious Domestic Abuse Assault. She was prohibited from contacting her spouse or child.  Officer Hill observed Ms. Steele slapping and punching her spouse while he was holding their child.

Events unfolded quickly. Officer Hill ran forward to protect the victims and the Steele family’s German Shepherd attacked him.  He commanded the Steele’s to get control of their dog and pulled his service weapon to defend himself from the dog.  As the dog attacked Officer Hill a second time, he discharged his weapon at the dog.  However, just as Officer Hill discharged his weapon at the dog, he unexpectedly slipped on a patch of ice and fell backwards. Officer Hill’s shot missed the dog and fatally struck Ms. Steele.

Officer Hill was deeply distressed, as any human being would be in those terrible circumstances, and his comments on the video must be viewed with that in mind.    However, accidentally causing the death of another person is not typically considered a criminal offense.   This is, in large part, why the Des Moines County Attorney declined to file any criminal charges against Officer Hill.   (<http://www.burlingtoniowa.org/DocumentCenter/View/2421/DMCA-report---Officer-Involved-Shooting---27-Feb-2015>)

Officer Hill and all the officers of the Burlington Police Department train very hard to protect and serve the public in a professional manner. The City steadfastly maintains that peace officers’ investigative reports, such as the body camera video in this case, should be viewed only for legally sanctioned reasons, such as in lawsuits or criminal cases.  In this case, Ms. Steele’s family’s attorneys received the video in their federal lawsuit.  The City resisted the public disclosure of this video and the other records to be released because it contends that such videos and records are legally considered “confidential” under Iowa law.   It will be difficult for police to obtain the cooperation of anyone in investigating a criminal offense if witnesses know that anything stated on camera may end up on the evening news, social media, or through other media formats.

The City of Burlington and the Burlington Police Department’s legal position in this case was never intended to offend the Steele family. Rather, the City and the Department continue to express their deepest sympathy to Ms. Steele’s family for their loss.