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To Whom it may concern,

On August 7-16, 2023, I attended the Gracie Survival Tactics Dual Certification program, taught in McDonough, GA. As a former police officer, and current Assistant District Attorney in the State of Tennessee, my purpose for attending the course was to both evaluate the curriculum for its congruence to the current use of force jurisprudence, as well as to survey the efficacy of the program, in considering whether or not its implementation as a training regimen might be something for which I'd advocate in my own law enforcement community.

In the current social and political climate, law enforcement officers from every area of the United States are faced with, arguably, the most difficult dichotomy imaginable. On the one hand, they are called to protect and serve the public, with all that that entails. On the other, they must enforce the law within the same population they are tasked to serve, and do so in a way that balances that servitude with an occasional show of authority, all without eroding the public trust. To do it imperfectly, constitutionally, and thus, legally, is difficult enough. But, the expectation that they can do it in today's environment, where their conduct is memorialized by cameras in every direction, and broadcast over live social media platforms, with the public expectation that they will be highly trained, and even experts in the appropriate use of force, is in a word, untenable.

If every law enforcement officer had adequate training and resources, balancing the above-described dichotomy might not be such a tall order. Unfortunately, however, many forces operate against that balance, not the least of which are the decentralized nature of law enforcement, as well as the scarcity of resources, making it next to impossible to even develop a working definition for "adequate training," much less actually being able to deliver something that resembles adequate training to the nation's LEOs in a measurable and meaningful way. At least, that's what I believed to be the state of things prior to attending this course.

Ahead of my GST training, I had taken a fresh look at the Graham V. Connor case, as well as the previous legal reviews submitted regarding the GST program. So, I had a vision of the program in my mind, which, surprisingly, did not quite align with the actual experience I had once I went through the training. I remembered that as a law enforcement officer, I learned about the use of force continuum, and how to mechanically think my way through the stimuli for each step in the escalation process. The scenarios

were presented based on severity, and each posed the same question—“what is the *highest* level of force a police officer could use in a scenario, given this particular stimulus.” The problem with that system of problem-solving, as I came to understand throughout the GST program, is that it causes an unintended, and largely uncontrollable, ride through the use of force continuum, which could be akin to the involuntary journey experienced by a raft on a river of whitewater rapids.

If, for example, the current use of force continuum is visualized as a train on a set of tracks, with each level of force being represented by a car, which then connects via a common doorway to the next car (the next escalated level of force on the continuum), traditional use of force guidelines provide empty cars, and position the law enforcement officer directly in the threshold of the common doorway, waiting for the stimulus from the subject, which then serves as the invitation/justification to cross the threshold, and into the next car, *read*-the next level of force. In other words, all of the space within the car initially occupied by the law enforcement officer is behind him or her, and thus, not able to be used, and as a consequence of all options being conceptually “behind them” there isn’t much to do except escalate into the next car of the train.

What I expected was basic jiu jitsu techniques, well-rooted in fundamental leverage principles, and a plea for the trainees to consider Gracie Jiu Jitsu for Defensive Tactics training. Instead, I was astounded by the number of options GST creates for the officer in each scenario, many of which survey the *least amount of force* an officer can use in a given set of circumstances. I was equally surprised at the amount of control the officer has over the escalation or de-escalation of force when GST techniques are properly utilized. In the traditional use of force continuum, very rarely can an officer move from a higher level to a lower level of force before the suspect is handcuffed or otherwise subdued. For example, in one particular technique, the officer trainee is positioned on their back, with the suspect between their legs, below the trainee’s hips, in a jiu jitsu position called the “guard.” The suspect places one of their hands on the trainee’s weapon, and attempts to gain control of it. The trainee is given multiple options from this position, utilizing leverage-based techniques, to travel *up or down* the use of force continuum.

Whereas, traditionally, the instant a suspect touches an officer’s gun, the situation becomes irretrievably escalated to one where deadly force is on the table, the GST program gives the officer such control over the scenario, that the well-trained officer, utilizing the proper techniques, can decide the best option for them to accomplish whatever their objective is. One option would be that the officer may redirect the suspect’s hand that is gripping the weapon, and employ the shoulder pin technique, positioning the officer to the side of the suspect, with the freedom and exclusive ability for only the officer to access the weapon, and with maximum control over the suspect’s pinned shoulder. From this position, the officer can decide what the best option would be. If they have fought until they are too exhausted to continue, they can utilize a “safe draw” and ultimately, deadly force. Or, using the same technique, the officer who took heed to one of the central themes of GST, “energy conservation,” and still has some fight remaining, can work to gain compliance, and transition to handcuffing, or simply use the superior position to buy time until backup arrives.

Another of the fundamental concepts taught in the GST program, is that the person who controls the distance between the two parties, controls the amount of damage that can be inflicted by either of them. One of techniques implemented to control distance is the technique of “framing.” Framing is the use of a part of the practitioner’s body, typically skeletal bone structure, like an arm, to create a barrier against a certain portion of the body of the opponent. For instance, if an officer is on the ground, lying

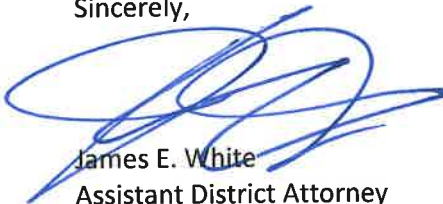
on their back, with a subject attempting to climb on top of them to gain a superior position known as the "mount", the officer might slightly turn to their side, extend and lock their arms out, using the strength and rigidity of their bones and arm structure to create space between the closing subject, and the officer. Within that "frame", the officer can work to best utilize the created space to accomplish a more favorable position, like possibly inserting a knee to prevent being mounted, move to a guarded "punch-block" position, or even get up in base to keep from being injured or controlled.

In returning to our visualization of the use of force continuum as a series of connected cars on a train, what the GST program does, on a macro level, is provide the officer in training with the tools of Gracie Jiu Jitsu to build row after row of seating within each car in which the conflict is currently situated, thus creating optional positions for each new row. This, in turn, helps the officer build the confidence and freedom with which to operate inside those spaces, such that instead of standing in the doorway awaiting an invitation by the subject to move into the next train car, the officer has the space, freedom, confidence, and ability, to keep the conflict within a given row of positions on the same level of force, to the extent that it might not ever escalate beyond that particular car.

Simply stated, the GST program provides the umbrella of an overarching mindset towards de-escalation, and that mindset is the central theme of the program. The term de-escalation is not mentioned ad nauseum in the program. Instead, the program relies on the belief that most officers only use escalated force because they aren't given viable options in the alternative. GST equips the trainee with many different tools, instills in him or her the value of transitioning between the different options to achieve control, and finishes with tireless hours of daily repetition, further cultivating the confidence and strategic competence to use the tools provided. This causes a measured response that isn't clouded by the panic of being forced to escalate without knowing what to do. The end result is that instead of having empty train cars for each of the traditional levels of force, and an accelerated path to deadly force, the properly trained officers find row after row of positions within which to work, and thus at least one answer to every position in which they may find themselves.

There will always be people who will escalate encounters with law enforcement, regardless of what the officers are trained to do, or ultimately, do. However, GST provides the impetus for officers to use less force, which helps to render excessive force, useless, and it proves invaluable as it relates to adding multiple layers of nuanced responses to the overwhelming nuance of the world law enforcement is tasked with policing.

Sincerely,



James E. White
Assistant District Attorney