In-Custody Death Investigation
Leng, Wang

King County Sheriff's Office Investigation
Incident # C18042509

King County Prosecuting Attorney
Public Integrity Team

Published: July 9, 2025

Table of Contents

I. INTRODUCTION 2
II. EVIDENCE REVIEWED 3
III. INVESTIGATION 3
1. Independent Investigation 3
2. Summary 3
3. Timeline 4
4. Officers' Reports 4
5. Video 6
6. Interviews 6
a. Involved Officer 6
b. Civilian Witness 1 (spouse) 6
7. Medical Records 10
8. Autopsy Report 10
9. Detective's Opinion on Use of Force 11
10. Inquest 12
IV. Law 12
V. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION 13

LEESA MANION (she/her)
PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

Office of the Prosecuting Attorney
CRIMINAL DIVISION
W554 King County Courthouse
516 Third Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98104
(206) 296-9000

DECLINE MEMORANDUM

In-Custody Death Investigation
Leng Wang

WARNING – This memorandum contains images and descriptions of violence that may be offensive and disturbing to some readers. The images and descriptions are included to provide the reader with the most accurate information regarding the topic of this memorandum.

I. INTRODUCTION

On August 5, 2018, Issaquah Police Department (Issaquah PD or IPD) Involved Officer 1 and Involved Officer 2 responded to a domestic violence call at the apartment of Wang Leng (Subject). Upon first contact, they saw him holding his wife's shirt. They quickly handcuffed him while leaning him face first against the couch. The officers learned from his wife that he is an Alzheimer patient. Mr. Leng then went unexpectedly limp and officers requested medical aid. No punching, hitting, or striking appeared to take place and the witness, Mr. Leng's wife, did not accuse the officers of using excessive force. Medics arrived and initially thought Mr. Leng was suffering from dehydration elevated blood pressure. At the hospital discovered was a previously undiagnosed degenerative spinal injury taking the form of long bony growth or protrusion forming from the vertebra forward and upward. Neck surgery was performed, and the Subject was discharged to rehab facility in Shoreline. He died one month later. The Medical Examiner ruled the death a homicide but with numerous contributing factors, such as severe degenerative spine changes and Alzheimer's dementia.

The KCPAO's determination if there is sufficient admissible evidence of a criminal action such that criminal charges should be filed is based entirely on the investigation materials provided to the KCPAO, relevant criminal laws, rules of evidence governing criminal proceedings, the applicable burden of proof, and the KCPAO's Filing and Disposition Standards. This determination is not intended to address matters outside the scope of this memorandum including, but not limited to, an administrative action by the involved agency or any other civil action. The KCPAO expresses no opinion regarding the propriety or likely outcome of any such actions.

The Public Integrity Team has determined that the investigation of the September 5, 2018, in-custody death is complete. Based on a thorough review, the Team has concluded that the evidence is insufficient to support criminal charges against any Issaquah Police Department Involved Officer 1 and Involved Officer 2. As a result, the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office declines to file criminal charges.

II. EVIDENCE REVIEWED

The KCPAO reviewed the materials provided by the investigator, including Issaquah PD and King County Sheriff's Office (KCSO) police reports, interviews, photos, autopsy report, computer-aided dispatch, and medical records, as well as answers to *Interrogatories to the Inquest Jury*.

III. INVESTIGATION

1. Independent Investigation

KCSO detectives did not respond to the scene as the death occurred one month after the officers' use of force on Mr. Leng. Upon learning Mr. Leng's death, Issaquah PD requested that KCSO perform an independent investigation into the officer's conduct to determine whether there was any criminal wrongdoing. KCSO Investigator 1 was the investigator assigned to this death investigation.

2. Summary

On August 5, 2018, IPD Involved Officer 1 and Involved Officer 2 responded to a domestic violence call at 245 SW Clark St, unit D-1, after a neighbor reported to 911, the sound of yelling and items being thrown from inside the Subject's apartment. When officers arrived at the Subject's apartment, his wife, Civilian Witness, 1 opened the door. Officers reported that the Subject was standing behind her holding her shirt such that her midriff was visible. Officers discovered an unexpected language barrier between them and the apparent couple who only spoke Mandarin. Officers reported that the door was being closed on them so they entered the home to detain the Subject in order to conduct a domestic violence investigation. The Subject then tensed up. Each officer then took hold of one of the Subject's arms and led him towards the living room couch where they leaned him face force against the couch and handcuffed him. Once handcuffed said the Subject immediately stopped tensing up and went limp. They learned from his wife that he had Alzheimer's disease. Officers immediately attempted to provide medical aid. The Subject was then transported to the hospital where he was found to have a compressed vertebrae and a previously unknown degenerative spine issue. Surgery on his spine was

performed. The Subject did not take well to rehab and passed away one month later in a rehabilitation facility.

3. Timeline

16:20:45hrs	Initial 911 call from neighbor
16:21:41hrs	Dispatch broadcast to IPD officers
16:21:39hrs	Involved Officer 1 enroute
16:22:20hrs	Witness Officer 1 enroute
16:23:09hrs	Involved Officer 2 enroute
16:23:17hrs	Witness Officer 1 cancelled from call
16:25:14hrs	Involved Officer 1 arrives on scene
16:25:24hrs	Involved Officer 2 arrives on scene
	(3 minute 40 second duration between initial dispatch and officer arrival - approx.)
16:27:09hrs	"One detained' broadcast from scene
	(1 minute 45 seconds duration between officer arrival and "One detained' broadcast - approx.)
16:27:37hrs	Request for aid unit broadcast from scene
	(28 second duration between "One detained' broadcast and request for aid broadcast- approx.)
16:28:09hrs	Request for language line number/code broadcast from scene
16:29:32hrs	First Eastside Fire aid unit enroute
16:29:39hrs	Update broadcast "Alzheimer's patient' from scene
	(1 minute 20 seconds between first language line request and "Alzheimer's patient" broadcast)
16:33:34hrs	First Eastside Fire aid unit arrives
17:25:02hrs	Patient (Leng) transported from scene by aid (via ESF run sheet)
17:30:36hrs	Patient (Leng) arrival at Swedish Hospital Issaquah (via ESF run sheet)
17:34hrs	All IPD officers are clear scene by this time.

4. Officers' Reports

Involved Officer 1 and Involved Officer 2 both describe a female (Civilian Witness 1) and male (Wang Leng) coming to the apartment door responding to their knock. Involved Officer 1 noted that the female's shirt appeared to be held from behind by the male. This caused her shirt to ride up exposing her stomach. Both officers noted a language barrier and inability to communicate with the occupants. Involved Officer 1 stated that the male made motions that he interpreted as being told to leave. Involved Officer 2 noted that male was pointing at them while making a loud noise similar to "dat, dat, dat, dat." He too interpreted this as being told to leave.

Both officers noted the apartment door was then being closed on them and that Involved Officer 1 stopped the door from being closed. Neither officer knew who tried to close the door. Involved Officer 1 stepped inside the apartment while trying to explain that they intended to see if everyone was ok. Involved Officer 1 reported that the male became very "erratic" by waving his arms around and yelling something.

Involved Officer 1 reported that he stepped to Leng's left and took control of Leng's left upper arm with his right hand and Leng's left wrist with his left hand (a common escort hold). Involved Officer 2 noted that Leng stepped toward Involved Officer 1 in "an aggressive manner" (no specific descriptions added). Involved Officer 2 then observed Involved Officer 1 take hold of Leng's left arm while he took hold of Leng's right arm (no specific detail regard the specifics of the hold). Involved Officer 1 described Leng as" struggling" at this point so he decided to move him to the nearby couch and motioned for Involved Officer 2 to assist. Involved Officer 2 states that they then lowered Leng on to his chest on a nearby couch. Involved Officer 1 added that Leng's chest was placed on to a large sitting pillow on the couch. Involved Officer 2 states that Involved Officer 1 placed Leng in handcuffs. Involved Officer 1 adds that the cuffs were double locked and checked for fit.

Involved Officer 2 reports that during the time Leng was being placed on the couch and handcuffed, Civilian Witness 1 was crying and presented a card that contained Alzheimer's information on it. Involved Officer 2 states that he understood that Civilian Witness 1 was telling him that Leng suffered from effects of Alzheimer's disease. Involved Officer 1 wrote that as soon as the handcuffs were applied he noted Leng's body "went limp". Both officers moved Leng to a wooden chair and Involved Officer 1 radioed for a medical evaluation of Leng by Eastside Fire Department. Involved Officer 1 stated that, while waiting for an aid unit to arrive, he observed that the wood chair seemed to be putting pressure on the handcuffs. Both officers describe moving Leng to a different chair that would be more comfortable for Leng while waiting. Leng remained handcuffed awaiting the aid unit. Neither officers describe Leng's condition during this waiting period. According to Involved Officer 2, Involved Officer 1 removed the handcuffs from Leng once Eastside Fire Aid Unit #L72 arrived in the apartment.

Both Involved Officer 1 and Involved Officer 2 note that Leng was evaluated by Eastside Fire units and was transported to Swedish Hospital Issaquah. Involved Officer 2 cited "blood

pressure concerns and possible dehydration" as the reason for transporting the Subject to the hospital.

Witness Officer 2 arrived on scene after the aid unit was treating Leng. She utilized the language line to communicate with Civilian Witness 1 and learned additional details of Leng's Alzheimer's diagnosis and symptoms. At some point after the aid units arrived, Civilian Witness 1's sister arrived at the scene.

Officers later learned from Civilian Witness 1 that Leng was trying to leave the apartment and having some outbursts stemming from his Alzheimer's status. Civilian Witness 1 was attempting to calm him down and get him back inside.

Involved Officer 2 noted the officers learned from Civilian Witness 1's sister that Leng has "walked away' before requiring IPD intervention (IPD case numbers 16-12641 and 18-07838 are cited). Involved Officer 2 states that "no DV had occurred" indicating no criminal activity took place at the residence and no criminal charges were appropriate.

Officers left the scene and wrote their reports in what is considered a timely manner. The case was essentially closed with the officers unaware of any developments in Leng's condition, his diagnosis of a compressed spinal column, or his ultimate death. This information appears not to have been reported to IPD until September 6, 2018, one day after his death.

5. Video

Neither officer was equipped with body-worn video cameras, so there is no video of the Subject's encounter with the police.

6. Interviews

a. Involved Officer

Neither provided a voluntary interview.

b. Civilian Witness 1 (spouse)

Civilian Witness 1 was interviewed by KCSO detectives. She said that on the day of the incident, at about 4:20 pm, the police knocked on the door. She and Leng had been back inside

for a few minutes by then and Leng was calmed down with no more yelling. Civilian Witness 1 said she opened the door and waived for the officers to come in. They did not though. Civilian Witness 1 explained that if she tried to close the door it was not to do anything wrong, but is a cultural way of not talking about private things in public. She said that she tried to invite the officers inside, not shut them out.

Civilian Witness 1 said Leng came from the bedroom and saw the police and said nonsense words again like "Wa Wa Wa." He stood behind her. Civilian Witness 1 did not see any hand motions by Leng as he was behind her. Civilian Witness 1 believes Leng only talked nonsense words. Civilian Witness 1 did not think Leng was touching her at this time. Specifically, she was not holding his hands, his hands were not on her shoulder, and he was not holding or otherwise grabbing her shirt, or she did not have that feeling. Civilian Witness 1 said that, had she have seen Leng acting up, she would have grabbed his hands to keep him calm. Civilian Witness 1 said that Leng stayed behind her until the officers stepped in and grabbed him.

Civilian Witness 1 confirms that there was a communication barrier between her and the police. This lasted in general until she was able to show an officer some paperwork that described the Alzheimer's condition. By this time Leng was already handcuffed on the couch. Civilian Witness 1 said she was not paying attention to all details and actions of the police as she was gathering the paperwork. She was aware that the police had grabbed on to Leng and were moving him towards the living room couch. This was simultaneous to her trying to locate an Alzheimer's flyer or card on the high table between the front door and couch. She wanted to show the card to the police, so they knew he was an Alzheimer's patient.

During a walk-through with investigators, Civilian Witness 1 demonstrated how the officers escorted Leng to the couch with arms/hands being held by both officers (one on each side). They moved toward the couch in that position. Civilian Witness 1 saw that Leng was placed on to the couch seat with his chest down on to the seat cushion. His face was either on a portion of the pillow or against the back cushion. Civilian Witness 1 confirmed that she did not see every action of the IPD officers as she searched for the Alzheimer's paperwork.



Figure 1: Civilian Witness 1 demonstrating the position officers placed her husband when handcuffing him.

Civilian Witness 1 saw that Leng had his knees on the living room floor with his chest and torso on the couch's seat cushion. Civilian Witness 1 said it looked like both officers were actively handcuffing Leng together. At one point it looked as though both of Leng's arms were held behind him and pulled upward. Civilian Witness 1 said the other parts of Leng's body that were being touched by the officers included the center of his upper back. Civilian Witness 1 did not see whether or not the officers used hands, forearms, elbows, or knees against Leng's back as he was on the couch. She felt as though the officers were holding on to his shoulders prior to handcuffing as she was grabbing the paperwork. Civilian Witness 1 did not describe any strikes, hits, punches, kicks, or otherwise overt uses of force. She felt the most force she saw was when the officers were manipulating his arms and shoulders behind him on the couch to handcuff him. Civilian Witness 1 does not know what specific action, movement, or force actually caused injury to Leng. She speculated that injury to his spine occurred as the officers were forcing him down to the couch and keeping him there for handcuffing. Civilian Witness 1 said the handcuffing was a very fast motion and her husband went limp (seemingly unconscious) immediately after these motions. At first, Civilian Witness 1 estimated this was a two-minute period from time the hands went on her husband to the time he went limp. When asked to clarify this timeframe Civilian Witness 1 said time was difficult to estimate but confirmed it was fast. Civilian Witness 1 said that she could not tell if Leng was resisting or trying to avoid being

handcuffed because it happened so fast. Civilian Witness 1 said she could not tell if the police had difficulty handcuffing Leng. She said that only the police would know this. Civilian Witness 1 said she first noticed Leng's body was limp was as soon as the officers tried to move him from the couch to the first chair.

Civilian Witness 1's first thought after seeing her husband became unconscious or unresponsive was that the officers had hit him in the head. Civilian Witness 1 confirmed she never saw this type of hit though and simply did not know what had happened. Civilian Witness 1 felt the officers used too much force overall without naming a specific action. Civilian Witness 1 added that she later noted bruising on Leng's right elbow and lower left leg (while hospitalized).

When Civilian Witness 1 saw that Leng appeared unresponsive, she called her sister on the phone and requested she come right over. Her sister speaks some English and could help communicate. By the time Civilian Witness 1's sister arrived, the medics were already present and the handcuffs were no longer on Leng. Civilian Witness 1 does not recall when or how the handcuffs were removed. She does not know if it was the police or medics who removed them. Civilian Witness 1 confirmed that Leng did not seem to respond to her, the officers, or medics at all once he initially went limp. Civilian Witness 1 recalled the early diagnosis by the medics as possible low blood pressure or dehydration.

Civilian Witness 1 said she went with Leng in the ambulance to the hospital. Civilian Witness 1 said she learned of a neck injury to Leng three or four days after he went to the hospital. Civilian Witness 1 described Leng as sleeping or unconscious for about 20 hours a day during the first few days of hospitalization - possibly because of medication. She said Leng ate a little food (fed to him by Leng) early on. Leng was aware of the neck surgery that Leng underwent. She was told that the spine had pressure on it to the point that it was broken or compressed. She was unaware of any fracture to spinal bones. After the neck surgery, Leng seemed to be in about the same condition - little if any improvement. Leng was moved to a series of Swedish care facilities soon after the surgery - after about 3 days. He was then sent to the Richmond Beach Rehabilitation facility in Shoreline. This is where he died. Various doctors did not give her a specific cause of death but they added that a blood infection due to his condition and hospitalization may be part of the cause.

Civilian Witness 1 said that she was unaware of any unusual bone growth or problems with Leng's neck, spine, or vertebrae. In general, Civilian Witness 1 believes Leng's neck injury was caused by the officers as they handcuffed Leng. She believes this was "very closely related' to his cause of his death.

7. Medical Records

Doctor 1 at Swedish Medical Center treated Mr. Leng from August 11, 2018 to August 11, 2018. About Leng's condition, Doctor 1 wrote:

> Mr. Leng suffered injury to his cervical spine injury. He underwent cervical spine surgery for decompression. (Posterior spinal fusion, C2 to T2.Segmental instrumentation, C2 to T2. Laminectomy, C3 through C7).
>
> Mr. Leng has advanced dementia and is [C]hinese speaking. He is not able to follow commands even with his wife as the interpreter. As the patient can not follow commands, it is anticipated that he will likely not be able to gain the ability to walk. Complicating this is that he has developed orthostatic hypotension related to his spinal cord injury and it is likely that this may be a permanent condition adding to likely an inability to stand without fainting. We will try medications and leg stockings to see if this will help. However, based on my past experiences with patients with severe dementia who have suffered a debilitating fracture such as this, I suspect Mr. Leng will be wheelchair and bed bound from this point on. I anticipate a downward trajectory with the high likelihood of aspiration pneumonia, dehydration, bed sores, and pulmonary embolism.

8. Autopsy Report

The medical examiner, Doctor 2, concluded:

> This 66-year-old man, who had a history of Alzheimer dementia, was involved in an encounter with law enforcement during which use of physical restraint was employed. The decedent subsequently developed symptoms of a cervical spinal cord injury, and underwent surgery for spinal cord decompression. He was later transferred to a rehabilitation care facility, where his condition declined and he died approximately two weeks later. Autopsy revealed severe degenerative changes in the cervical spine and changes in the spinal cord consistent with post-traumatic syringomyelia. The cause of

> death is certified as aspiration pneumonia due to post-traumatic syringomyelia of cervical spinal cord due to blunt force injury of the neck. Diffuse idiopathic skeletal hyperostosis, cervical spondylosis, cervical spinal stenosis and Alzheimer dementia are included as contributing conditions. As the initial injury occurred in the circumstances involving the use of physical restraint, the manner of death is certified as homicide.

KCSO Investigator 1 spoke Medical Examiners, Doctor 2 and Doctor 3 about their findings. Of particular note was an obvious and unusual bony growth on at least one of Leng's cervical vertebrae (prominent bridging osteophyte formation). This growth took the form of a long bony protrusion forming from the vertebra forward and upward. This protrusion had been forming for an extended period of time and likely not a result of the recent injury. Evidence of a compression-type injury to the spinal cord at this location was also evident. . Doctor 2 and Doctor 3 speculated to this investigator that the changes to Leng's spine may have created a situation where his spine would have been much more susceptible to a compression-type injury without experiencing a significant or traumatic injury or force.

9. Detective's Opinion on Use of Force

KCSO Investigator 1 wrote the following regarding Involved Officer 1 and Involved Officer 2's use of force:

> Regarding the "level of force" used on Leng, there is no evidence to suggest that Involved Officer 1 and Involved Officer 2 used any force beyond what was necessary to control and handcuff Leng. The exact details of this force are still lacking however. Despite this, given the circumstances and consistency in description between Civilian Witness 1 and the officers, it appears that Leng was simply held in some version of a two-officer escort hold, walked to the couch, and handcuffed as his torso was briefly held on the couch cushions. None of these actions seem unreasonable in this circumstance. In addition, there is no evidence to suggest that the officers, Civilian Witness 1, or perhaps even Leng himself were aware of the severe degenerative spinal changes that Leng suffered from. This investigator also noted that Civilian Witness 1 made no specific allegation of overt use of excessive force (claims of punching, kicking, or other sever impacts for example) against the officers. Her chief complaint was the overall unnecessariness of the

> officers going hands-on with Leng and using any level of force at all to handcuff or restrain him.
> …
> Therefore no probable cause exist to arrest, cite, or charge IPD Involved Officer 1 and Involved Officer 2 in relation to the injuries and related death of Leng.

10. Inquest

The Inquest jury unanimously found that Involved Officer 1 and Involved Officer 2's conduct was not criminal in nature. They also unanimously found that in their interaction with Mr. Leng, both officers followed their department's policies pertaining to proper handcuffing and addressing medical concerns. Three jurors found that the officers followed their department's use of force policy, while the other three jurors said they did not know. [1]

IV. Law

KCPAO's Filing and Disposition Standards state, "Crimes against persons will be filed if sufficient admissible evidence exists, which, when considered with the most plausible, reasonably foreseeable defense that could be raised under the evidence, would justify conviction by a reasonable and objective fact-finder."

The State has the burden of proving beyond a reasonable doubt that the use of force was not lawful. Unlike civilians, police officers are permitted to use force in some situations other than simply in self-defense. For instance, the use of force upon or toward the person of another is lawful when necessarily used by a public officer in the performance of a legal duty.[2] State law defines necessary to mean that, under the circumstances as they reasonably appeared to the actor at the time, (1) no reasonably effective alternative to the use of force appeared to exist and (2) the amount of force used was reasonable to effect the lawful purpose intended.[3]

---

[1] Additionally, in a civil rights lawsuit brought by Leng's family, a civil jury found no wrong doing on the part of the officers.
[2] RCW 9A.16.020.
[3] RCW 9A.16.010.

V. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

Here, although the evidence shows that the officers were a cause of Mr. Leng's death, the law permitted the officers to use a reasonable amount of force to effect a detention, which is what the evidence shows they did here.

The accounts by Civilian Witness 1, Involved Officer 1, and Involved Officer 2 statements regarding the over-all physical events were generally consistent. Some obvious differences of perspective are evident and expected. All agree on the major facts of Leng's initial detention, escort to the couch, handcuffing, and Leng's immediate seeming loss of consciousness. They agreed on the overall flow of events. Civilian Witness 1, for example, did not observe or accuse the officers of grossly overt or clearly unreasonable or illegal use of force, her claim of general excessive use of forth notwithstanding.

The officers responded to a domestic violence call. When they first saw the Subject, they claim they saw him grabbing his wife's shirt from behind. They then walked him to the couch holding each arm and handcuffed him face first on the couch. The encounter appears brief in nature. They did not know of his medical condition at the time, either his Alzheimer's or undiagnosed spinal abnormality. Had they known of these conditions before they went hands-on the force may have not been reasonable, but by all accounts, they did not.

Additionally, Civilian Witness 1 also does not claim seeing either officer hit, punch, kick, or strike in any way. An Inquest jury, civil jury, and the leader investigator all found that the officers did not use excessive force.

The officers then immediately provided Mr. Leng medical aid. When Mr. Leng's body went limp, they immediately attempted to provide him aid by sitting him down on a chair, calling a medic, and the language line so an interpreter could assist. When Mr. Leng was taken to the hospital, everyone, including the officers, were under the assumption that Mr. Leng was suffering from dehydration or low blood pressure. It was only one month later when IPD was notified of Mr. Leng's death that they soon became aware that he had a spinal injury. Mr. Leng's death was tragic, but there is not sufficient evidence to show the officers' conduct was criminal in nature. As such, the KCPAO declines to file criminal charges against either Involved Officer 1 or Involved Officer 2.