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IN THE STATE OF WASHINGTON  
KING COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF EXECUTIVE SERVICES

IN RE: THE INQUEST INTO THE  
DEATH OF ISAIAH OBET

No. 417IQ7199

CITY'S BRIEFING ON FACTUAL  
SCOPE OF INQUEST

**I. INTRODUCTION**

Pursuant to section 9.a. of the Administrator's November 11, 2019 Pre-Inquest Order, the City of Auburn respectfully submits this briefing on the proposed scope of factual inquiry.

**II. ARGUMENT**

At approximately 12:20 pm on June 10, 2017, Isaiah Obet unlawfully entered into the apartment of Leah Cody and Donaven Gillespie (both strangers to him), threatened them with a knife, and demanded money from them. *Obet\_I 0021*. Based on Obet's actions and demeanor, Cody and Gillespie both told police they believed they were about to die. *Id.* After a brief exchange with Cody and Gillespie, Obet fled the apartment and Cody called 911 to report the home invasion. Officer Nelson was dispatched less than a minute later. *Id. at 0428*. While en route, Officer Nelson received a description of the home invasion, a description of Obet, and his direction of travel. *Id.* Meanwhile, Obet ran approximately two blocks north, and confronted Maria May-Nahuat, who had just pulled up to her house in her car. *Id. at*

1 0195. Obet opened her car door, pressed his knife into her chest, and demanded the keys to  
2 the car. *Id.* When May-Nahuat refused, Obet raised the knife as if to stab her. Fortunately,  
3 May-Nahuat’s husband saw the attack, and ran out yelling at Obet to leave his wife alone.  
4 Obet again ran away. A neighbor who had watched the assault and attempted carjacking  
5 called 911, again describing Obet and his direction of travel, all of which was relayed to  
6 Officer Nelson, still en route. Less than four minutes had passed between Obet’s home  
7 invasion on Cody/Gillespie and his assault and attempted carjacking of May-Nahuat. *Id. at*  
8 *0428.*

10 Within a minute or two, Officer Nelson arrived in the area, and saw Obet walking  
11 down the street, as shown on Nelson’s dashcam video. As Officer Nelson did a U-turn to  
12 contact Obet, Obet ran into the middle of the street, stopped yet another vehicle – a minivan  
13 occupied by a lone woman – and attempted to drag her from the car at knife point. *Id.* Officer  
14 Nelson immediately stopped, exited his vehicle, and ordered Obet to stop. Obet ignored  
15 Officer Nelson, continued to violently yank on the door handle of the minivan, and repeatedly  
16 struck the window with his knife, all while the terrified driver cowered inside the vehicle.<sup>1</sup> *Id.*  
17 *passim.* Officer Nelson’s actions stopped Obet’s continued dangerous criminal activity that  
18 was immediately threatening to the life and safety public and the life of this vehicle occupant  
19 in particular.

22 According to the express language of the applicable Executive Order, “[t]he purpose  
23 of the inquest is to provide public inquiry into the **causes and circumstances surrounding**  
24 **the death** of [decedent].” *PHL-7-1-2-EO, Appendix 2, §11.1* (emphasis added). Based on

27 <sup>1</sup> The relevance of the events that follow this – the confrontation and eventual shooting – is unlikely to be in dispute, so the specific facts are not further addressed here.

1 this language, each of the facts and incidents described above are clearly within the scope of  
2 the inquest, and should be submitted to the jury for consideration. Those events, as testified  
3 to by those who were actually there, are inextricably part and parcel of the “causes and  
4 circumstances” surrounding Obet’s death. It would be nonsensical to ask the inquest jury to  
5 provide the public insight into the causes and circumstances of Obet’s death without hearing  
6 about the events that directly resulted in that death.  
7

8 To be clear, the analysis may be different if this were a civil case against Officer  
9 Nelson or the City of Auburn. In that situation, the relevant legal question would be whether  
10 Officer Nelson acted reasonably based on the facts and circumstances *of which he was aware*  
11 at the time he used force. But what Officer Nelson was individually aware of is not the  
12 question in an inquest. Again, the question here is much broader: what were the facts and  
13 circumstances surrounding the death? That question can only be answered if the jury is  
14 presented with the *actual* facts, and the *actual* circumstances.  
15

### 16 III. CONCLUSION

17 The City respectfully submits that Obet’s actions in the several minutes leading up to  
18 his death – actions that directly caused his confrontation with Officer Nelson – are clearly  
19 within the scope of the inquest, and preventing the inquest jury from receiving such evidence  
20 would be improper and contrary to the applicable Executive Order.  
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DATED this 13th day of December, 2019.

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**DECLARATION OF SERVICE**

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Washington that on the below date, a true and correct copy of the foregoing document was served upon the parties listed below via E-mail only, per agreement:

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DATED this 13th day of December 2019, at Seattle, Washington.

/s/ Teresa A. Caceres

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