

# ASIRT DECISION

**IN THE MATTER OF A USE OF FORCE BY RCMP  
OFFICERS IN COWLEY ON MARCH 23, 2024**

Acting Executive Director: Matthew Block

File No.: 2025-0009(S)

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## Introduction

On March 12, 2025, pursuant to s. 46.1 of the *Police Act*, the Director of Law Enforcement directed the Alberta Serious Incident Response Team (ASIRT) to investigate allegations of an excessive use of force in an arrest in Cowley on March 23, 2024. ASIRT designated two subject officers, with notice to each. ASIRT's investigation is now complete.

## ASIRT's Investigation

ASIRT's investigation was comprehensive and thorough, conducted using current investigative protocols, and in accordance with the principles of major case management.

ASIRT investigators interviewed the affected person (AP) and reviewed her medical records related to this incident.

As the subjects of a criminal investigation, the subject officers were entitled to rely on their right to silence and not speak to ASIRT. In this case, both subject officers provided a written statement and participated in an interview with ASIRT investigators.

ASIRT investigators also interviewed one additional civilian witness and four additional police witnesses.

ASIRT investigators reviewed all available video of the incident, including video from four police vehicles (WatchGuard system is equipped with forward-facing and rear-facing cameras).

ASIRT investigators also conducted a scene examination.

## Circumstances Surrounding the Incident

On March 23, 2024, just before midnight, RCMP officers were dispatched to a suspicious persons report of three people walking off Highway Three in Cowley and into a farmhouse. The first officer on scene observed footprints leading to an open window of the farmhouse and the call was then upgraded to a break and enter. Additional RCMP officers were dispatched to the event.

An older female and civilian witness #1 (CW1) presented themselves to police upon request and were arrested. Officers continued to give commands for the AP to present herself, and she eventually emerged from behind a curtain at the top of a small staircase. Subject officer #1 (SO1) and subject officer #2 (SO2) provided repeated directions for the AP to come down the stairs; however, she failed to do so. SO2 grabbed the AP's shoulder and pulled her down the stairs and onto the ground, where she was arrested.

The AP alleged that she sustained a miscarriage a couple of days later as a result of being taken to ground during her arrest.

## Scene

ASIRT investigators attended the farmhouse to conduct a scene examination. They observed a flight of four steps leading from the living room into the kitchen. At the top of the steps, there was a blanket attached to the top of the doorway (Figure 1).



*Figure 1 - Staircase between the living room and kitchen of the farmhouse. In this photo, the blanket covering the doorway is pulled to one side.*

## *Affected Person (AP)*

ASIRT investigators interviewed the AP twice.

The AP recounted being with her grandmother and her boyfriend, CW1, on March 23, 2024. She had been living with her grandmother at the time, and they were fleeing from her grandmother's abusive partner. The AP's grandmother took her and CW1 to what she believed was a friend's house in Cowley but they ended up in the wrong house by mistake. The door to the property was unlocked. They hid inside as they believed her grandmother's abusive partner was right behind them. The AP recalled hiding in an upstairs washroom in the rear part of the house, which was accessed via a couple steps in the main floor living room. It was dark outside, and they did not turn any lights on in the house.

She believed they were only there for approximately 10 – 15 minutes before they saw vehicle headlights through the window and someone knocking aggressively on the door and announcing themselves as the RCMP. The AP's grandmother left the house to speak to the police, and then both her grandmother and CW1 reassured her that it was safe to come out. She was still fearful and did not want to come out of hiding.

The AP indicated that she was behind a blanket being used as a curtain, which was in the doorway above the stairs. The officers came in with flashlights and were directing her to come out with her hands up. She pulled back the curtain and held her hands up. A female officer, believed to be SO1, had her gun pointed at her face, which scared her and caused her to back up into the curtain. SO2 was also present and had his gun pointed at her. A third officer was standing further back with CW1 in handcuffs.

SO1 and SO2 grabbed her by her right and left jacket shoulders respectively while she was standing at the top of the stairs and pulled her straight down to the ground. She landed on her stomach fairly hard – the force used winded her and caused her pain. The officers then pinned her down on the ground on her stomach and handcuffed her. She was held on the ground for approximately one to two minutes, with pressure being applied to her handcuffed wrists and back. SO1 then forcefully lifted her to her feet and placed her in the police vehicle. She recalled crying throughout.

The AP believed that she was approximately five to six weeks pregnant at the time of the incident. She went to have bloodwork done approximately 12 weeks after the incident, which confirmed her pregnancy. After a further one to two weeks, she was kicked out of the house by her grandmother and was living in a camper with CW1 in British Columbia. The camper was subsequently vandalized in a violent incident. It was around the time of this incident that she began bleeding and cramping and believed she lost the baby. She did not have any further tests to confirm the pregnancy loss. The AP confirmed that she was not aware that she was pregnant until the bloodwork was done and therefore did not mention it to the officers on the date of the incident. She also confirmed that at around the 17-week mark, according to her timeline, she was taking unknown herbal remedies to help with her cramping and pain. The AP acknowledged some confusion around the timeline she was articulating as she indicated that she had a lot going on at the time.

In a subsequent interview, the AP was provided with an opportunity to clarify her pregnancy timeline after a review of her medical records, which were cross-referenced with her original written complaint and the information provided during her initial interview with ASIRT. She was confronted with the inconsistency between her original complaint filed almost one year after the incident, which reported that she sustained a miscarriage two days after her arrest, and her medical records from April 30, 2024, which confirmed she knew she was still pregnant approximately five weeks after her arrest. The AP could not account for the discrepancy in her reported timeline of her pregnancy and merely indicated that that period of her life was very stressful, with many incidents occurring, and so it was all a blur. The AP also alluded to having been influenced by her mother and CW1 to make the complaint.

The AP acknowledged that during her first interview she had incorrectly reported attending the hospital 12 weeks post-arrest, when in fact it was approximately five weeks later. She also adjusted the timeline for her pregnancy loss, indicating that she believed she miscarried approximately five to six weeks after attending the hospital. She maintained that she believed the stress of her arrest had contributed to her pregnancy loss. The AP confirmed that she had been prescribed and collected medications to terminate her pregnancy; however, she subsequently decided against taking them.

### *AP's Medical Records*

The AP's medical records were obtained by ASIRT investigators pursuant to the AP's signed consent release.

The medical records confirmed that she attended the Crowsnest Pass Health Centre emergency room on April 30, 2024, where she was presenting with pregnancy concerns, including significant nausea, vomiting, and minor abdominal cramping. Based on information provided by the AP, it was estimated that she was five weeks and six days pregnant. All pregnancy options were discussed, and the AP opted for a medical termination of the pregnancy. She was discharged with oral medication for this purpose.

### *Civilian Witness #1 (CW1)*

ASIRT investigators interviewed CW1, who was the AP's boyfriend.

CW1 reported that on the date of the incident, he had fled to a rural property in Cowley with the AP and her grandmother. They were running away from the AP's grandmother's boyfriend. When they arrived at the house, the door was unlocked, and the house was in complete darkness. He believed the AP's grandmother knew the homeowner. They were hiding in an upstairs back-room bathroom.

CW1 observed a flashlight shining into the house and heard a person announcing that they were RCMP and telling them to "come out." The AP's grandmother went outside to speak with the police, and she was arrested. He was then arrested inside the downstairs living room of the residence by a male officer, believed to be witness officer #1 (WO1).

He also described seeing a female officer, believed to be SO1, pointing a pistol at the AP as she emerged from behind a blanket at the top of a set of three stairs. He indicated that the AP moved the curtain with her hands held up. As she stepped down onto the first step, SO1 grabbed the AP's shoulder and dragged her down the remaining steps and slammed her face first onto the floor.

She then dropped her weight onto her knee positioned on the AP's mid-back. SO2 then arrived and did the same, dropping his weight onto the AP's back. They told the AP to stop resisting. CW1 indicated that the AP was not resisting but rather crying in pain. CW1 reported hearing SO2 tell the AP to stop

resisting or he would “tase her.” He recalled voicing his concerns to the officers about whether it was necessary to use that level of force in arresting the AP. He was then removed from the residence and placed in a police vehicle.

CW1 believed that the AP was pregnant at the time of the arrest as she had been experiencing morning sickness prior to the arrest. He advised that they had subsequently attended a hospital and confirmed that the AP was pregnant. They were given a prescription for a drug to terminate the pregnancy. Although they filled the prescription, he noted that they decided the AP would not take the medication.

CW1 recalled an incident approximately one to two weeks after attending the hospital involving a violent person damaging their camper van. He advised that the AP experienced the pregnancy loss after that incident.

### *Subject Officer #1 (S01)*

S01 provided a full account of the incident, with the below areas being particularly relevant to ASIRT’s investigation.

S01 confirmed that on March 23, 2024, she was on-duty as an RCMP member stationed at the Pincher Creek detachment. She was dressed in full police uniform as were all other officers involved. She recalled officers being dispatched at approximately 11:39 p.m. to a suspicious persons complaint reporting three people walking along the highway into the ditch and then observing flashlights near a small farmhouse. Two of her colleagues were dispatched first and followed footprints from the highway to a residence. Approximately 20 minutes after the initial call, she was dispatched to assist.

While en route to the call, she overheard updates that the initial officers on scene had taken one person into custody. Upon her arrival, she noted that there weren’t any lights on in the residence and the property was only illuminated by the police vehicles on scene. She approached and entered the front door of the residence with W01, armed with her service pistol. W01 encountered a person just inside the front door and placed them under arrest. She did not recall anything about this person. Based on the information from the initial call that three people were involved, S01 continued into the residence, accompanied by S02, to try to locate the third person.

S01 and S02 were standing in a living room. There were four or five stairs leading up to another room whose doorway was covered by a hanging curtain. S01 called out for the person to come out with their hands up, but they did not comply. S01 attempted to swat the curtain to the side and in so doing obtained a visual of the AP. The AP was standing at an elevated position vis-à-vis S01 and S02, as they remained at the bottom of the stairs. S01 directed the AP to show them her hands and advised her that she was under arrest. The AP poked her hands through the curtain. Efforts to fully pull the curtain down were unsuccessful.

The AP then began coming down the stairs slowly and hesitantly. SO1 had her service pistol drawn and pointed at the AP. SO1 advised that her threat assessment was still high because officers had not yet been able to clear the upstairs area and so it was not clear whether she had access to any weapon. She also described the AP as behaving in a “dodgy” way, and it felt to her that the AP was wanting to go back up the stairs despite both SO1 and SO2 giving her direction to come down. When the AP got about halfway down the stairs, SO2 grabbed onto the AP’s shoulder and brought her down to the ground in a controlled manner. The AP was then arrested for break and enter, handcuffed, searched, stood up, and escorted by SO1 to the police vehicle without any issue. SO1 noted that the AP was emotional and crying throughout. SO1 estimated that the time between the AP being taken to the ground and being placed in the police vehicle was one to two minutes.

SO1 denied that the AP gave any indication that she was in pain or mentioned that she was pregnant at the time. SO1 attributed the AP’s crying to being young and perhaps having her first encounter with police, where a gun had been pointed at her. SO1 confirmed that she is also trained as a police tactical medic, which allows her to provide advanced medical care to RCMP members and the public when local emergency medical services (EMS) cannot respond. During the AP’s arrest, she did not observe anything or hear the AP complain of anything that would have suggested that the AP required any medical attention.

### *Subject Officer #2 (SO2)*

SO2 provided a full account of the incident, with the below areas being particularly relevant to ASIRT’s investigation. SO2 recounted substantially the same information as SO1.

SO2 confirmed that his risk assessment of the situation was high. He noted that while en route to the call, a radio update had been provided by an officer on scene that people had entered the residence. So, they were now responding to a break and enter complaint at a farmhouse that was in complete darkness. It was also dark outside. They were not aware of how many people were inside the residence or if any weapons were involved. Upon his arrival, he noted that another officer had already entered the residence without any backup, which also increased his threat assessment as he was concerned for the safety of all involved.

SO2 advised that he observed WO1 and SO1 enter the residence. WO1 had taken an older female and a male into custody, and SO1 had continued further into the residence. He followed SO1 into the main living area. SO1 was standing at the bottom of a set of stairs and giving verbal direction for someone to come out from behind the curtained doorway at the top of the stairs. SO1 unsuccessfully tried to pull the curtain down to give them a line of sight into the upstairs living space. The AP emerged from behind the curtain but was still not complying with directions to come down the stairs and get on the ground. She was in an elevated position and continued to look past them. The AP’s body language also suggested to him that she didn’t think it was a big deal that she was in the residence. Given that they had not yet cleared the remainder of the residence, SO2 perceived an ongoing officer safety concern.

SO2 grabbed the scruff of the AP's jacket, on her right shoulder, and guided her down to the ground in a controlled descent. He held her down on the ground for approximately 10 seconds while SO1 was applying handcuffs. He described doing so by placing his weight on his right knee, which was on the floor, and resting his left knee on her left shoulder to prevent any upward movement. He indicated that the AP was on the ground for less than a minute before being stood up and escorted outside. He denied the AP gave any indication that she was injured, in pain, pregnant, or in need of any medical assistance.

### *Witness Officers*

ASIRT investigators interviewed four witness officers.

Each of the witness officers recounted substantially the same information as the subject officers. They each confirmed that they were dispatched just before midnight to a report of three people walking off the highway into a farmhouse. The first officer on scene reported footprints in the snow leading to an open window and the call was then upgraded to a break and enter.

Each officer reported that their risk assessment of the situation was high as there were no lights on in the house and they were aware of a minimum of three people in the house.

### *Witness Officer #1 (W01)*

W01 recalled arriving at the house and being joined by SO1. They announced that they were the police, and an older female presented herself at the door. W01 arrested this woman and placed her in his police vehicle. W01 and SO1 then entered the house with their weapons drawn. CW1 presented himself at the doorway and W01 arrested him. Three other officers then entered the house. CW1 advised that his girlfriend, the AP, was still inside the residence but was afraid to come out. W01 continued to deal with CW1 while four other officers, including SO1 and SO2, dealt with the AP. He could hear officers giving the AP commands and knew that she was not complying as they had to continue to repeat themselves. He did not see the officers physically engage with the AP but heard her begin crying immediately after her arrest. He did not recall hearing CW1 verbally engaging with the AP inside the residence.

### *Witness Officer #2 (W02)*

W02 recalled entering the house alongside SO2 and witness officer #3 (W03). They immediately observed that W01 had CW1 under arrest. CW1 advised the officers that the AP was the only other person in the residence and began imploring her to give herself up as the police were there. Verbal commands were given by officers to the AP, who was believed to be in a kitchen area that was raised above the living room and accessible by a set of steps. The doorway to that kitchen area was covered by a curtain. W02 noted that he and SO2 were respectively standing approximately 15 feet and 10 feet away from the stairs.

The AP emerged from behind the curtain but did not reveal herself completely. Her right-hand side remained obscured by the curtain. Commands were issued for her to come down the stairs, but she failed to do so. He observed SO2 grab hold of the AP and pull her down to the ground in a controlled takedown. He commented that it was one of the "softer" takedowns that he has seen. He believed that CW1 had already been removed from the residence when the AP first presented herself at the top of the stairs.

### *Witness Officer #3 (WO3)*

WO3 recalled being the last police vehicle to arrive on scene. He was accompanied in his vehicle by SO2. He could hear over the radio that other officers had already entered the house. He entered the house with WO2 and SO2, and he was the last to enter. Both he and SO2 had their pistols drawn. He noted that WO1 already had CW1 in custody. He observed the AP standing at an elevated position in a doorway that was covered by a hanging blanket. He could not see the AP's entire body as it was obscured by the blanket. SO1 was standing directly in front of the AP and issuing her commands, but the AP was not complying. SO2 moved around SO1 and approached the AP. SO2 then grabbed hold of the right side of the AP's body and pulled her down to the ground in a controlled manner.

### *Witness Officer #4 (WO4)*

WO4 recalled being the first officer to respond to the report of suspicious persons on the highway. He observed three sets of footprints leading up to an old farmhouse from the highway and followed them to an open window. He heard noises inside the residence, announced his presence, and looked through the window using his flashlight. He then updated the call to advise that it was likely a break and enter. Additional officers were dispatched and arrived approximately five to 10 minutes later. He remained outside the house throughout the call and did not observe any police interaction with the AP inside the residence.

### *WatchGuard Videos*

ASIRT investigators reviewed the WatchGuard videos from four police vehicles operated by SO1, WO1, WO3, and WO4. None of the videos captured the AP's arrest inside the residence. The wireless microphones worn by some of the officers captured audio of the police interaction with the AP that could be heard on their WatchGuard videos. Below is a summary of what could be seen and heard during the police response on this date.

WO1 arrived at the house at 11:54 p.m. and joined WO4. The headlights from WO1's vehicle were positioned so as to illuminate the front of the farmhouse. WO1 began calling out, "RCMP, come on out," multiple times without a response. The AP's grandmother presented herself at the door and WO1 placed her under arrest without issue. She initially denied that anyone else was in the home, saying "it's just me in there now" in response to WO1 advising of information that there was three of them. She subsequently said that only her son remained inside. She was then placed in the back seat of WO1's police vehicle.

SO1 arrived at 11:59 p.m. WO1 and SO1 then stood at the door and called out to CW1. The front door was notably not able to fully open as it was getting stuck on frozen patches of snow. Police had to break apart the frozen areas to be able to open the door wide enough for police to enter by turning sideways. WO1 and SO1 entered the house and announced, "RCMP." CW1 presented himself inside and WO1 could be heard effecting his arrest. CW1 advised that his girlfriend was in the bathroom.

At 12:00:22 a.m., WO3 and SO2 arrived together and made their way into the house alongside WO2. CW1 called out to the AP and told her to come out several times.

At 12:01:48 a.m., SO1 made further announcements to “come out with your hands up” and to “step out.” A few seconds later, a male member, believed to be SO2, repeatedly told the AP to, “get down on the ground.” The sounds of a scuffle could then be heard and CW1 was heard saying, “relax.” The AP was overheard crying. CW1 was overheard telling officers the reasons they were in the residence, which were consistent with what he stated during his interview.

At 12:02:23 a.m., SO1 told the AP she would be rolled onto her side and SO1 spoke calmly to the AP and explained that she was under arrest. The AP was no longer crying. SO1 was then heard helping the AP to sit up and then come up to standing.

At 12:02:33 a.m., CW1 and the AP were both led out of the house at the same time by police. They were each taken to separate police vehicles.

## Analysis

### Section 25 Generally

Under s. 25 of the *Criminal Code*, police officers are permitted to use as much force as is necessary for the execution of their duties. For the defence provided by s. 25 to apply to the actions of an officer, the officer must be required or authorized by law to perform the action in the administration or enforcement of the law, must have acted on reasonable grounds in performing the action, and must not have used unnecessary force.

All uses of force by police must also be proportionate, necessary, and reasonable.

Proportionality requires balancing a use of force with the action to which it responds.

Necessity requires that there are not reasonable alternatives to the use of force that would also accomplish the same goal. These alternatives can include no action at all. Analysis of police actions must recognize the dynamic situations in which officers often find themselves, and such analysis should not expect police officers to weigh alternatives in real time in the same way they can later be scrutinized in a stress-free environment.

Reasonableness looks at the use of force and the situation as a whole from an objective viewpoint. Police actions are not to be judged on a standard of perfection, but on a standard of reasonableness.

### Section 25 Applied

Both SO1 and SO2 were lawfully placed and acting in the execution of their duties in responding to a break and enter call. Both subject officers were required or authorized by law to investigate possible criminal activity and were acting on this duty throughout the incident.

The event unfolded relatively quickly. The WatchGuard videos confirm that the police interaction with the AP specifically occurred over less than a minute. Only 45 seconds elapsed between the time commands were being directed by police solely at the AP, at 12:01:48 a.m., and the time she was observed being brought out of the residence, at 12:02:33 a.m. For several seconds prior to the police engagement, CW1 was also heard encouraging the AP to present herself to police.

All the police witnesses agree that their threat assessment of the situation was elevated given that they were dealing with an unknown number of people, where they were aware of at least three, in a darkened and unfamiliar environment. When the AP presented herself, she was in an elevated position vis-à-vis the officers and continued to remain partially concealed behind a hanging blanket. Even in the face of repeated directions, which were heard on the WatchGuard videos, the AP would not come down the stairs towards the officers on her own motion. During the AP's interview, she described somewhat retreating in the face of police directions, which is also consistent with SO1's observation that the AP was behaving in a "dodgy" manner and giving the impression that she wanted to retreat.

The AP, CW1, and all involved officers provided relatively consistent accounts of what transpired inside the residence. They primarily disagree on which subject officer physically pulled the AP to the ground, the way she was pulled to the ground, and whether any force continued to be applied while she was on the ground.

Both the AP and CW1 reported that SO1 participated in pulling the AP to the ground. All officers, including SO2 himself, confirmed that it was SO2 alone who pulled the AP to the ground. SO1 merely assisted with handcuffing the AP once she was on the ground and then stood her up and escorted her out of the house to a police vehicle.

All officers confirmed that they observed the AP being taken to the ground in a controlled manner. The experience of being pulled down a couple of stairs to the ground would no doubt be unsettling and the landing may not have been particularly delicate; however, that does not mean that her fall was also not controlled. The AP was not noted to have sustained any injuries in the fall.

Both subject officers deny continuing to apply force to the AP, apart from the minimal force required to apply handcuffs, while she was on the ground. SO2 specifically noted that he merely rested a knee against her shoulder to prevent any upward movement while she was being handcuffed. None of the witness officers reported seeing any further application of force once the AP was on the ground beyond what would be expected during handcuffing. Whatever force was applied was fleeting given that the entirety of the actual physical interaction with the AP occurred within less than a 45 second span.

It was reasonable and necessary for SO2 to grab onto the AP and pull her down the few steps to the ground. The amount of force applied to the AP by SO1 and SO2 throughout her arrest was minimal. No more force than necessary was used by either officer during their arrest of the AP.

### *The AP's Pregnancy Loss*

The AP's medical records estimated that as of April 30, 2024, she was 5 weeks and 6 days pregnant. This would coincide with her becoming pregnant on a date three days prior to her interaction with police and would be consistent with the AP's stated lack of knowledge that she was pregnant at the time. Likewise, officers would also have had no way of knowing that she was pregnant at the time of her arrest.

The medical records are also inconsistent with the AP's initial complaint, which inaccurately reported that she miscarried two days after her arrest. The AP clearly learned of her pregnancy and had knowledge that she was still pregnant approximately five weeks after her arrest. There were no other reported clinical concerns with the pregnancy documented in the medical records.

The evidence is unclear with respect to when the AP experienced her pregnancy loss, though the

medical records suggest this occurred sometime after April 30, 2024. Based on the available evidence, it is not possible to determine whether the pregnancy loss was related to the arrest.

### Conclusion

On March 23, 2024, the AP was found inside a farmhouse in Cowley after reports of a break and enter at that address.

S01 and S02 were required or authorized by law to arrest the AP and acted reasonably in doing so. The use of force by S01 and S02 in effecting the AP's arrest was proportionate, necessary, and reasonable. As a result, there are no reasonable grounds to believe that an offence was committed.

Original signed

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Matthew Block

Acting Executive Director

May 13, 2026

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Date of Release