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## Secrecy behind SIU investigations leaves no public recourse



The case of an 80-year-old woman being Tasered and the subsequent clearing of a police officer by the Special Investigations Unit of any wrongdoing is a case that cries out for further inquiry and more public scrutiny, says Toronto criminal lawyer [Jordana Goldlist](#).

And, with [police in the province now allowed to carry Tasers](#), Goldlist is concerned it is going to become a first resort, rather than a last resort, for handling situations involving civilians with mental health issues.

According to an article in the [Toronto Star](#), the investigations unit cleared a Peel police officer for the injuries Iole Pasquale suffered after she was Tasered this past summer in an incident in Mississauga.

“In my view, the attending officers had the lawful authority to apprehend Ms. Pasquale under the [Mental Health Act](#),” writes unit director Ian Scott in a press release. “I am of the opinion that the involved officers could reasonably conclude that she suffered from a mental disorder and may cause serious bodily harm to herself or others.”

It raises a broader question, says Goldlist, “we need to ask whether the police will learn how to use their words before they use their Tasers. Are we going to see more of this type of response now that all police officers allowed to carry a Taser? Surely, this cannot be an automatic response to every disturbance.”

Goldlist says it's this type of incident where the public needs to take action. “They need to be outraged and they need to be vocal about it.”

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The incident, which saw the woman sustain a broken hip after she was Tasered, is the type of case where police need to verbally de-escalate the situation, rather than resorting to Taser someone.

“I’m shocked with the decision to even take out their Taser,” says Goldlist. “I don’t know how much time was spent talking her out of it or what other steps they took to calm her down, but I can’t imagine the need to Taser an 80-year-old woman with a knife.”

There has to be some distance with someone holding a Taser and the person who is shocked, says Goldlist. “If an officer is able to create some distance between himself and the woman, is it really the type of urgent situation requiring a Taser? Why not get other police to help contain the situation? We’re talking about a knife as opposed to a gun. It didn’t sound like she was charging at him, and at the end of the day she’s 80, how much force and speed could she possibly be moving with? How is this trained police officer not able to otherwise gain physical control and take the knife away?”

The problem is, with all the unanswered questions about what actually happened and how the SIU investigation was handled, the public will never know, says Goldlist, a major flaw in how these cases are handled and the secrecy surrounding them.

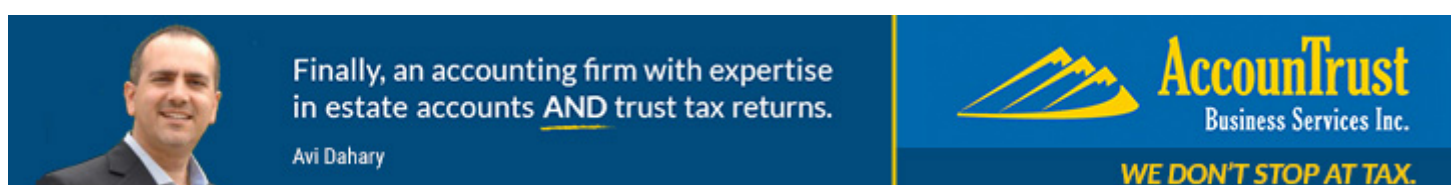
“I think that the public should be able to see the information that the SIU bases their investigation on,” says Goldlist. “There’s not even a suggestion that she was threatening anyone. She was carrying a knife, so what does that mean? It doesn’t seem like they tried to de-escalate the situation. Surely this cannot be how we as a society want police treating elderly civilians having a mental health breakdown.”

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