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Criminal Div.
Circuit Court For
Baltimore City

STATE OF MARYLAND * IN THE
Plaintiff * CIRCUIT COURT
v. * FOR
CAESAR GOODSON * BALTIMORE CITY
Defendant * Case No. 115141032

* * * * *

**MOTION *IN LIMINE* TO PRECLUDE TESTIMONY AND EVIDENCE CONCERNING
BALTIMORE POLICE DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDERS AND POLICIES
RELATED TO THE USE OF SEATBELTS IN POLICE VEHICLES**

Defendant Caesar Goodson, through his counsel, moves *in Limine* to order the preclusion of testimony and evidence concerning Baltimore Police Department general orders and policies as they relate to the use of seatbelts in police vehicles. In support thereof, Defendant states the following:

- I. **Baltimore Police Department general orders and policies relating to the use of seatbelts in police vehicles must be excluded from the trial of Officer Goodson because the failure to seatbelt a detainee cannot constitute evidence of a depraved heart, recklessness, or gross or criminal negligence.**

It is anticipated that the State may seek to introduce testimony and evidence concerning Baltimore Police Department general orders and policies as they relate to the use of seatbelts in police vehicles. Specifically, it is anticipated that the State will make reference to such information as evidence that the failure of a Baltimore police officer to seatbelt a detainee during transport constitutes the depraved heart, recklessness, or gross or criminal negligence necessary to establish the crimes of murder, second degree assault, involuntary manslaughter, manslaughter by motor vehicle, and reckless endangerment. However, given that these general orders and policies are unique to Baltimore City, they cannot be admitted for this purpose. Accordingly,

they are irrelevant to, and must be excluded from, the trial of Defendant Officer Goodson as unduly prejudicial.

In *State v. Pagotto*, the Court of Appeals of Maryland analyzed the legal significance (or insignificance) of an alleged violation of a geographically unique Baltimore Police Department guideline. 361 Md. 528, 550-51 (2000). In *Pagotto*, a Baltimore Police Department sergeant was convicted of involuntary manslaughter and reckless endangerment as a result of a traffic stop during which his handgun accidentally discharged, killing the driver of the vehicle. *Id.* at 534-38. In order to establish the gross or criminal negligence needed for the conviction, the State relied upon three alleged violations of Baltimore Police Department guidelines. *Id.* at 538-39. One of the guidelines at issue required police officers to place their trigger finger underneath the trigger guard of their weapon when drawn. *Id.* at 544. Sergeant Pagotto had allegedly violated this guideline by placing his finger along the "slide" or side of his weapon, thereby negligently increasing the risk that his finger would slip to a position where it could cause the weapon to accidentally discharge. *Id.*

In evaluating whether the evidence presented by the State was legally sufficient to sustain the conviction, the Court found that the trigger finger placement guideline was unique to Baltimore City. *Id.* at 544-45. Officers in other jurisdictions were permitted to place their trigger finger along the side of their weapon in order to improve their reaction time in critical situations. *Id.* at 544. Moreover, the guideline was enacted relatively recently, as it had been published just three years prior to the events at issue. *Id.* In light of this information, the Court adopted the reasoning of the intermediate appellate court and held that any alleged violation of the Baltimore Police Department guideline, "whether considered alone or in combination with any other factor, [did] not remotely generate a *prima facie* case of gross negligence." *Id.* at 550

(emphasis added) (quoting *Pagotto v. State*, 127 Md. App. 271, 310 (1999)). Rather, "at best, [it] amounted to an actionable case in civil negligence." *Id.*

In elaborating upon the absurdity of the State's argument that a police officer's conduct can be permitted in one jurisdiction, while also being deemed criminally negligent in another merely because it violates a departmental guideline, the Court adopted the following language from the intermediate appellate court:

Had a Maryland State Trooper or a Baltimore County Officer, for instance, ridden along with Sergeant Pagotto on February 7, 1996, and engaged in precisely the same conduct that Sergeant Pagotto did, that State Trooper or County Officer would have been acting with complete propriety with respect to the placement of the trigger finger on a weapon. Had Sergeant Pagotto himself placed his trigger finger on the "slide" of his weapon on February 7, 1993, instead of on February 7, 1996, he would then have been acting with complete propriety. Except for a criminal violation of a local municipal or county ordinance, precisely the same act under precisely the same circumstances cannot be a crime in Baltimore City but not a crime in Baltimore County.

Id. at 551 (citations omitted). The Court of Appeals further reaffirmed the intermediate's court's finding that the State's reasoning was "illogical":

The State's logic leads to the conclusion that a police officer placing his finger on the slide of the weapon is criminally negligent behavior if committed by a Baltimore City Police Officer in Baltimore City, but acceptable, non-criminal behavior if committed by any other police officer anywhere else in the State. The Court of Special Appeals was correct in concluding that this result is illogical.

361 Md. at 551.

Any Baltimore Police Department general order or policy relating to the use of seatbelts in police vehicles is geographically unique to Baltimore City. Handcuffed detainees are routinely transported in police vans, without being seatbelted, in other jurisdictions throughout Maryland. As detailed in a survey published by The Baltimore Sun, "prisoner transport vans used by county law enforcement agencies [in the Baltimore region] generally are not equipped with seat belts." See Alison Knezevich & Pamela Wood, *Most Police Vans in Baltimore Region*

