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Policeman shoots, kills farmworker armed with knife

Officer went to check on his health

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Article Text:

A Pike County sheriff's deputy shot and killed a knifewielding man Thursday morning while checking on the man at his home, authorities said.

The deputy and a state Department of Human Services worker went to the home of the farmworker after his boss reported that he had become ill and wouldn't seek medical attention, authorities said.

At some point during the visit, the man went into his house and grabbed a knife, then came out swinging it at the social worker, Prosecuting Attorney Bryan Chesshir said.

Deputy Chris Thompson stepped between the two, and that's when the man began threatening Thompson with the knife, Chesshir said.

Thompson, who repeatedly told the man to drop the knife, fired a round after the man lunged at him, Chesshir said.

"Statements taken so far indicate the individual was approximately 3 feet away, still lunging at the officer" when the shot was fired, the prosecutor said.

The 41-year-old man, whom authorities did not immediately identify, was pronounced dead at the scene. Authorities said they were still trying to notify his family Thursday afternoon.

The farm owner twice sought help from the sheriff's office, saying his employee's health was deteriorating, and was distraught over the shooting, Chesshir said.

"He was just going to get him help," he said.

It was unclear what type of health issue the worker had.

The information reported to Human Services that launched the home visit is confidential, said Julie Munsell, a spokesman for the department. The information reported to the Adult Protective Services agency would have had to meet certain criteria to prompt the social worker to investigate, she said.

Such criteria can be an allegation of abuse or neglect or information that a person lacks the capacity to make decisions about his health or safety, she said.

Munsell said it's common for social workers or investigators to ask law enforcement to assist because the situation can be volatile.

The farm where the shooting occurred is on Arkansas 84 in the northern part of Pike County. The man's body was sent to the state Crime Laboratory for autopsy.

Chesshir said it was too early to say whether the shooting was justified. The Arkansas State Police is investigating.

Thompson was put on administrative leave pending the outcome of the inquiry.

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