

## Nov. 4 Incident: Facts and Subsequent Action

### University of Houston

#### SUMMARY

UHPD received a call about an assault in progress on Nov. 4. A witness on the scene (a UH student) reported a violent, physical struggle between a man and a woman in an alley, near a loading dock between two buildings. The witness described a woman being assaulted by a man who was covering the woman's mouth as she attempted to scream for help. The witness and responding officers reported seeing the man holding what appeared to be a knife. The lead officer drew his sidearm and positioned it in the "low and ready" position, meaning it was not pointed at any individual. Within seconds of arrival, the officer determined that two student actors were rehearsing a scene involving screaming, arguing and a physical struggle. The witness believed they were seeing a crime in progress and UHPD officers acted appropriately and according to protocols. No crime was committed and there was no threat to campus safety.

#### TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Nov. 4, 2022 at 1:34pm a call is made to UHPD for an assault in progress (below are excerpts from the call. Read the [full transcription.](#))

- :03** **Witness:** Yeah, I just witnessed some girl screaming for help.
- :46** **Dispatcher:** With tattoos (inaudible). Listen, does he have any weapons? **Witness:** I do not know and I do not want to get any closer.
- 1:02** **Witness:** He's grabbing her, covering her mouth (Inaudible).
- 1:16** **Witness:** It's happening right now, I don't want to get closer. Right now.
- 3:16** **Witness:** I see the officers right now.
- 3:46** **Dispatcher:** OK, are you speaking to the officer or did you just flag him down? **Witness:** Yeah, it's still happening. He's got a knife, he's got a knife. **UHPD Dispatcher:** OK male has a knife? **Witness:** Yeah.
- Police Report 22-1454:** Lead officer reported hearing yelling. As he turned corner, he had weapon unholstered and saw the man holding "piece of paper which appeared to be a knife at first in a downward motion towards" female "who was attempting to block him."
- Supplemental Report 22-1454 King:** Secondary officer also reported the male had "an object that looked like a knife in the stabbing down motion" and the female "screaming/frantic/distressed holding his right hand from coming down." Officer reported that the lead officer had his firearm positioned it in the "low and ready" position.
- Police Report 22-1454:** Lead officer asked both individuals to show their hands and get on the ground. Both comply and say they are rehearsing
- Supplemental Report 22-1454 King:** They then both yelled out that they "we're rehearsing, we're rehearsing" showing their hands and doing as commanded.
- 3:57** Officer heard calling Code 4 (under control) over dispatch radio
- Supplemental Report 22-1454 King:** He (lead officer) immediately holstered his gun ... and tried to comfort/console and assess both students who were visibly shaken up.
- 4:11** **UHPD Dispatcher:** OK sir, looks like they are advising it was some type of rehearsal. **Witness:** No [expletive] way **UHPD Dispatcher:** No, you're fine, you did the right thing. I understand. You did the correct thing, ok, don't worry.

#### RESPONSIVE ACTION

On Monday, November 14, the School of Theatre & Dance faculty held a planning meeting with a staff representative from UHPD, with the intent of determining strategies that would protect students and prevent this from happening again. After a few suggestions presented by faculty were discussed, including

sectioning off practice areas and signage, brightly colored vests were determined to be the best course of action to ensure proper visibility. This was a solution that was arrived at with the best of intentions on all sides, but it was not the right course of action nor was it vetted or approved by Police Chief Ceaser Moore.

### **FACTS ABOUT THE VESTS**

- 50 vests were ordered.
- Vests were distributed to all MFA actors (graduate students) as early as Friday, Nov. 18, by the head of MFA Acting.
- All 15 MFA actors had been informed of the police incident and had received their vests by Nov. 22.
- The remaining 35 vests were given to the head of the undergraduate acting program during the week of Nov. 21, 2022.
  - Some undergraduate BFA acting students received vests before the end of the fall semester.
  - Others received their vest at the start of spring-semester classes, as fall class meetings ended before they could receive their vests during the prior semester.
- The actors who received the vests were briefed by a member of the faculty. There was no formal communication.
- Students were reminded during these discussions that scenes involving violence or loud arguments should not be rehearsed outdoors.

Since the students began expressing their concerns about the vests last week, the following has occurred:

- Leadership and faculty of the college were joined by the police chief in a meeting with students on Thursday, Jan. 26.
- The college has retracted the vests recommendation and will not ask students to wear vests
- The dean of the college was invited to a student-organized forum on Wednesday, Feb. 1, and accepted the students' invitation. The dean is committed to open dialogue with students about this incident and to finding the best path forward.
- Starting last week, on Friday, Jan. 27, Counseling and Psychological Services has been providing free, on-site accessible counseling support services in the School of Theatre & Dance; services are being provided this week at the Moores School of Music.

### **Media Response**

Media have been provided: media statement, three police reports, audio file and email from Dean Andrew Davis to College of the Arts students. Call transcription was provided to requests on and after 1/31. UH has responded to all media follow-up questions.

1/30 Houston Chronicle\*, Daily Cougar\*

1/31 Texas Tribune, Fox26, ABC13

2/1 NBC News

*\*Call transcription was created on 1/31 and not provided prior to 1/31*

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### **NEXT STEPS**

The safety of our students remains our top priority. We recognize that the students are concerned about their own safety. We are committed to ensuring that students have the opportunity to rehearse in safe spaces indoors and to providing safety practices that reduce the potential for public alarm, confusion or misunderstandings. To that end, the:

- McGovern College leadership has identified an indoor space to provide those student actors who choose to rehearse indoors.

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- McGovern College leadership is reviewing its guidance for those student actors who choose to rehearse outdoors that they are provided with appropriate safety protocols, especially for scenes of purported criminal activity or violence that could cause public alarm or confusion.
- The dean is establishing a college-wide working group of students, faculty and staff, with representatives from each area of the College, to help the administration better respond to students' concerns and needs.
- Questions have been received from the Student Government Association and a FAQ for the November 4 incident has been developed.
- The University will continue to cultivate a community of care to promote and enrich the health and well-being of our students by providing programs through [the Center for Diversity and Inclusion](#) and [UH Counseling and Psychological Services](#).