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Note: Paragraph in *italics* was not in the print edition, only the Internet version posted Saturday afternoon.

## Officer facing new probe

### Cop cleared in suspect's death in 2008 under investigation in shooting of knife-wielding man

By Daniel Tepfer and Brian Lockhart

BRIDGEPORT -- It was an eerily familiar sight -- State Police investigators taking Bridgeport Police Lt. Brian Fitzgerald's gun following a shooting.

It was five years ago to the day that state police took then-Sgt. Fitzgerald's service weapon after Fitzgerald fatally shot the unarmed Frederick McAllister in the back at the Success Village housing complex.

This time, police said Fitzgerald and another officer, Mark Belinkie, fired at 35-year-old Michael Stinson after they said he lunged at them Thursday with a knife. Stinson remained in critical but stable condition Friday night at Bridgeport Hospital.

"I am troubled by the parallels," said Antonio Ponvert III, who represented the McAllister family in a lawsuit against Fitzgerald and the city. "There does seem to be some hallmarks of what happened in our case."

*In response to Ponvert's comments, Elaine Ficarra, Mayor Bill Finch's director of communication, said in a statement Saturday, "contrary to Attorney Ponvert's assertion, the city and Lt. Fitzgerald prevailed on all claims made in regard to the death of Mr. McAllister. We are confident the use of force in this matter will also be found to be justified."*

This latest shooting comes at a time when city officers are already under fire for allegations of excessive force, with three officers placed on administrative duty after a video surfaced showing them kicking and stomping a suspect. Also this week, an East Side family came forward to say they were arrested after police shot the 52-year-old father, a state employee, with a stun gun. Family members claimed they were abused by two officers and have filed a formal complaint; the city is now conducting an internal probe into the incident.

While he wouldn't confirm the identity of the two cops involved in Stinson's shooting, State Police Lt. J. Paul Vance confirmed that their guns were taken. The shooting is under investigation by the State Police and the Bridgeport State's Attorney's office.

Bridgeport Police Chief [Joseph Gaudett](#) said his department will cooperate completely with the ongoing State Police investigation.

"We will be examining their guns as part of doing every aspect of the investigation," Gaudett said.

"Based on the information before us, Thursday's police-involved shooting appears to be completely justified," he said. "These officers followed their training and showed great restraint. They fired their service weapons as a last resort after the armed suspect lunged at them even after officers attempted to subdue him with a department Taser and pepper spray. The officers are understandably shaken up. They have my support and the support of this department."

The incident that led to the shooting started shortly before 9 p.m. Thursday, when a security guard for the [University of Bridgeport](#) saw a man, later identified as Stinson, attempting to break into an unmarked city police car that was parked on Atlantic Street at the intersection with Lafayette, Vance said. Police were immediately notified and an officer and security guard spotted Stinson, at which time a foot pursuit began.

During the foot pursuit, Stinson took a large knife out of a sheath and began threatening the pursuing officer and security guard with it.

Vance said more Bridgeport officers responded to the scene, joining in the pursuit of Stinson who entered a small vestibule area of an apartment building at 557 Atlantic St. The police officers deployed their stun guns and pepper spray several times in an attempt to subdue the armed subject, using less than lethal force. However, nothing seemed effective on him.

"The subject continued to threaten and lunge at the officers with the knife, at which point he was shot multiple times by two of the Bridgeport police officers," Vance said. "The suspect was finally subdued and taken into custody, though he continued to fight with EMS workers who provided emergency care to the suspect on scene."

As in the McAllister case, police said Fitzgerald was off-duty and working on an overtime assignment when he responded to the call for assistance.

In October a [Superior Court](#) jury of three women and three men deliberated over four days before clearing Fitzgerald of any civil wrongdoing in the death of McAllister. He had previously been cleared of any criminal wrongdoing by the Bridgeport state's attorney.

Ponvert said even though the jury did not come in with a money verdict, it did find the city negligent in the treatment of McAllister.

"One would hope that the message would have been heard by Police Chief Joseph Gaudett and city officials and there were changes made in the training and policies that would prevent the death of citizens at the hands of police officers," he said. "Or maybe this is more evidence of a breakdown in police policy and training."