

August 22, 2006

Dear Police Chief:

This weekend, as you know, a Woonsocket resident died after being subdued by police with a Taser weapon while in police custody. Unfortunately, this death was in some sense inevitable in light of the continually-growing evidence that stun guns are not the non-lethal device that proponents purport them to be.

Two years ago this month, the Rhode Island ACLU sent a letter to police departments in the state urging that the weapons not be purchased, as we cited research at the time that questioned the Taser's safety record and the way it is used on suspects. Since then, many more questions have been raised about the weapon's use and safety, and as Taser sales have increased, the number of deaths associated with their use has also skyrocketed. Yet the guns continue to be marketed as a "non-lethal" alternative to handguns. I have taken the liberty of enclosing a copy of the 2004 letter we sent, for to the extent that the data cited in that letter is outdated, the questions surrounding this weapon have only grown.

Of course, we know few details about this recent death or the extent to which the Taser may have been responsible for it. At the very least, however, in light of the evidence that is already available, this death should serve as a wake-up call that the Taser's use is potentially lethal and should only be employed as an alternative to deadly force. In the meantime, we urge any departments that have the weapons to impose a moratorium on their use until additional information can be gathered on this tragic incident, until the safety of the weapon has been independently and more thoroughly scrutinized by your department, and until your department has had a chance to carefully review both its policies and training procedures governing the weapon's use.

In that regard, the ACLU is interested in examining the policies and procedures that police departments using Tasers currently have in effect. Therefore, **pursuant to the Access to Public Records Act**, we request that you provide us a copy of any such policies and procedures of your Department, along with any Departmental training materials on the weapon's use. As provided for by the Act, we look forward to receiving the requested documents within 10 business days, and are willing to pay reasonable copying costs for those documents.

Thank you in advance for your attention to both our concerns and our request for documents under the Access to Public Records Act.

Sincerely,

Steven Brown
Executive Director

Enclosure