

Sean T. Brandenburg
Chief of Police



Key West **POLICE DEPARTMENT**

TO: Citizen's Review Board

FROM: Lieutenant Jeffrey Dean

DATE: February 2, 2024

RE: CRB 24-002 Lawson

On January 17, 2024, Officers Bernatova and Lopez responded to the 2600 block of Seidenberg Ave in reference to a suspicious person, later identified as Christopher Lawson. Lawson had approached some residents at their home on the 2600 block and told them he would be storing his vehicle on the city right of way near their house. The reporting person noticed the registration on Lawson's vehicle (Honda Element) was suspicious and called the police.

Upon making contact with Lawson, Officers attempted to issue a trespass warning to Lawson for the reporting person's residence. Lawson had no valid driver's license and the temporary tag on his vehicle was expired since January 5, 2020. The vehicle was checked for a valid registration through all 50 states.

As officers were attempting to identify Lawson, he began talking in a rhetoric consistent with Sovereign Citizen beliefs {Sovereign Citizen do not recognize certain laws such as a requirement to have a driver's license or license plate while operating a vehicle (see attached for more on Sovereign Citizens)}. Lawson was detained for officer safety while his identity was established.

Due to the fact that Lawson's vehicle had no valid registration, Officer Lopez had the vehicle towed consistent with municipal ordinance 70-128 (see below).

Sec. 70-128. - Abandoned vehicles and vessels.

(a) Definitions (supplemental to the definitions of section 70-1)

i. **"Abandoned vehicle** or vessel" shall mean any **automobile**, bus, truck, truck trailer, vessel trailer, moped, scooter, motorcycle, electric vehicle, golf cart, trailer, camper, recreational vehicle, motor home, travel trailer, or any type of watercraft, whether motorized or not and whether habitable or



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not, **that has been determined to be abandoned property**, as defined in F.S. § 705.101, pursuant to the procedures of F.S. ch. 705 (or a successor statute).

ii. *"Inoperable vehicle"* shall mean a vehicle incapable of being immediately driven, including, but not limited to, a vehicle that either does not have an engine or does not have wheels or tires.

iii. *"Junked vehicle or vessel"* shall mean a vehicle or vessel that is substantially dismantled, including, but not limited to, a vehicle or vessel that has incurred substantial damage.

(b) No owner or other person shall leave an abandoned vehicle or vessel on a right-of-way or in a public place in Key West.

(c) The movement of an abandoned vehicle or vessel to another location within 100 feet shall not alter its status as abandoned.

(d) When an enforcement officer observes an abandoned vehicle or vessel on the public right-of-way or in a public place, he or she may cause its removal consistent with the provisions of F.S. ch. 705 (or a successor law). An inoperable or junked vehicle or vessel, or a vehicle without a current license tag, constitutes prima facie evidence of abandonment.

Based on the above municipal ordinance, along with the fact that Lawson was detained during a trespassing investigation, Officer Lopez did not violate any state statutes or Key West Police Department policies.



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