

James E. Cockrell
Commissioner

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STATE OF ALASKA



Department of
Public Safety

Anchorage, Alaska

PRESS RELEASE

Two Alaska State Troopers Charged with Assault

August 15, 2024 (Soldotna, AK) — Alaska Department of Public Safety James Cockrell announced today at a press conference that two Alaska State Troopers have been charged with misdemeanor assault, after an arrest they made in May 2024, on the Kenai Peninsula. The Troopers are identified as:

- 49-year-old Joseph Miller, a 14-year employee of the Alaska State Troopers, who most recently served as a shift supervisor in Soldotna. Miller was charged with one count of Assault in the Fourth Degree.
- 42-year-old Jason Woodruff, a 16-year employee of the Alaska State Troopers, who most recently worked as a K9 officer in Soldotna. Woodruff was charged with one count of Assault in the Fourth Degree.

On May 24, 2024, the Alaska State Troopers and Kenai Police Department responded to reports that a vehicle was parked in a public right of way and was registered to an adult male with an active misdemeanor warrant. The law enforcement officers who responded attempted to contact the occupant of the vehicle, however, he remained hidden in the rear of the vehicle for several minutes and did not respond to law enforcement. Troopers spotted the adult male in the back of the vehicle and ordered him to exit the vehicle, as they believed that he had a warrant for his arrest. The adult male disputed the fact that he had an active warrant and refused to exit the vehicle.

Miller then broke a rear window and dispensed pepper spray into the vehicle, due to the male's defiance. The adult male began to exit the vehicle, however, he continued to defy directives once outside of the vehicle. While Troopers attempted to handcuff the man, Miller placed his boot on the adult male's head, pushing it into the ground covered in broken glass. Miller deployed his taser multiple times while other Troopers attempted to handcuff the man.

Woodruff then deployed his K9 as the man appeared to be beginning to comply with commands from officers and continued to order the K9 to bite the man.

The man was ultimately placed in handcuffs and provided first aid care by two other Troopers until EMS arrived and took him to an area hospital for further treatment of significant injuries. A short time later, Troopers learned that the adult male did not have an active warrant and was not the person that they were looking for.

A standard review of the use-of-force and application of a K9 was conducted by the supervisors of the Troopers and K9 program, which is a required practice whenever there is a use-of-force or K9 application by a Trooper. Based on this initial review, potential policy violations were discovered and

DPS leadership was alerted. DPS Commissioner James Cockrell ordered the Alaska Bureau of Investigation to conduct a criminal investigation into the incident. Once that investigation was complete, it was referred to the Alaska Office of Special Prosecutions for independent review and to determine if criminal charges should be filed. On August 14, 2024, the Alaska Office of Special Prosecutions filed criminal charges on both officers, in Kenai District court.

“The Alaska State Troopers hold ourselves to extremely high standards of conduct and accountability. Any allegation of criminal conduct by a Trooper or employee is aggressively investigated, so that we can hold the employee accountable for their actions, just as we would for any person accused of committing a crime in Alaska,” said **Alaska Department of Public Safety Commissioner James Cockrell**. “Let me be clear, the actions of these two individuals are not acceptable to me, not in line with our training and policy, and I know it is not acceptable to the Alaskans we serve. While today is an unfortunate day for the Alaska State Troopers, I hope Alaskans will continue to place their trust in the hundreds of Troopers who honorably serve Alaskans every day, by ensuring public safety across the state.”

The charges are only allegations and are not evidence of guilt. Both Miller and Woodruff are presumed innocent and are entitled to a fair trial at which the prosecution must prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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