



AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION FOUNDATION OF COLORADO

CATHRYN L. HAZOURI EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MARK SILVERSTEIN, LEGAL DIRECTOR

March 8, 2004

Letters to the Editor
The New York Times
229 West 43rd Street
New York, NY 10036

Re: Reply to New York Times Article March 7, 2004

Dear Editor:

In its front-page article on Tasers March 7, the Times notes that the American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado has raised concerns about the increasing number of deaths associated with the use of electroshock weapons. The article then states, incorrectly, that “none of the deaths were officially attributed to the effect of the weapons.” On the contrary, medical examiners in a number of cases have declined to exonerate electroshock weapons. The ACLU of Colorado reviewed 5 such cases in a recent letter to Denver’s police chief, including one in which a coroner’s inquest squarely stated the cause of death was electrocution.

The Times article relies on unnamed and unspecified “officials” who reportedly state that “other health problems, like heart conditions and drug overdoses” are “the cause” of taser-associated deaths. This blame-the-victim “explanation” overlooks the evidence that Tasers may be a contributing cause of death in the case of persons with heart disease or high levels of street drugs in their system. When the electroshock weapons are used on such persons in situations where lethal force is not even arguably justified, tasers may wind up taking lives instead of saving them.

Sincerely,

Mark Silverstein
Legal Director