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## **News Release**

For Immediate Release: December 11, 2013

### **Statement to the Community from Police Chief Jose L. Lopez Sr.**

First and foremost, our deepest sympathies continue to be with the Huerta family.

After allowing time for the investigative process, I am here to release updated information concerning the in custody death of Jesus Huerta that occurred on November 19<sup>th</sup> at approximately two o'clock in the morning.

Out of respect for the family, I have personally communicated with them through their attorney prior to releasing this statement to allow them to hear this information from me before it was released publically.

Officers were dispatched to the 1200 block of Washington Street in reference to a runaway. Upon arrival in the area, Officer Samuel Duncan encountered Jesus Huerta, who was believed to possibly be the runaway. Another male with Huerta was also located at the scene and he gave officers a false name. Another officer took this person, Jaime Perez, to headquarters where Perez was issued a citation for resist, delay, and obstruct and then he was released.

Officer Duncan discovered that Jesus Huerta had an outstanding warrant for his arrest issued in July for second degree trespassing. Based on the preliminary investigation, it appears that Officer Duncan handcuffed, searched and detained Jesus Huerta in the back seat of his patrol car while the investigation into the incident continued.

Officer Duncan then transported Jesus Huerta to police headquarters to obtain a copy of the warrant before transporting him to the Durham County Jail. As Officer Duncan pulled into the parking lot of headquarters, he heard what he thought to be a gunshot within the vehicle. Officer Duncan jumped from the vehicle for fear of being shot. The patrol vehicle rolled through the parking lot of headquarters and came to rest against another parked vehicle.

Officer Duncan immediately notified the 911 communications center that he believed a shot had been fired. He also called for EMS after observing Jesus Huerta slumped over in the back seat, still handcuffed behind him and not moving. Upon closer examination, it appeared that Huerta had a self-inflicted gunshot wound to his head and a handgun was found in the floorboard of the patrol car. Our department continues to investigate the origin of the weapon but can confirm that it was not a departmental weapon and no officer fired a weapon during this incident. The medical examiner's office has confirmed that Jesus Huerta died from a gunshot wound to his head. Whether that wound was accidental or intentional is unknown at this time.

I know that it is hard for people not in law enforcement to understand how someone could be capable of shooting themselves while handcuffed behind the back. While incidents like this are not common, they unfortunately have happened in other jurisdictions in the past.

The SBI is continuing to conduct an independent investigation into the events surrounding this incident for any possible criminal violations-, which is standard procedure for an incident of this nature. Also in accordance with our standard procedures, our Professional Standards Division is conducting an administrative investigation to determine compliance with department policies and procedures. Officer Duncan remains on administrative duty with pay pending the completion of the investigation.

Once again our thoughts and prayers remain with the Huerta family as we work through this sad and difficult situation.