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LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER TRAINING CASE OF THE MONTH

By Don Hays

Month of December – 2026

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LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER TRAINING CASE OF THE MONTH

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People v. Michael J. Schneringer, 2026 IL App (5th) 240726, October 10, 2026.

THE CASE - Schneringer was stopped for a traffic violation. Schneringer approached the Officer's squad car and then attempted to return to his truck. Did Schneringer commit the offense of Obstructing a Peace Officer by disobeying an order of the Officer and attempting to return to his truck?

THE FACTS: According to the arresting Officer, the follow events occurred. The arresting officer witnessed an older model pickup truck traveling at a slow rate of speed. The officer followed the truck and saw the truck (driven by Schneringer) fail to signal a left-hand turn. The Officer followed the truck for a short distance, and the Schneringer pulled his truck over to the side of the road. According to the Officer, he parked his patrol car approximately 12 feet behind the truck and turned his emergency lights on and initiated a traffic stop. As the Officer was still in his squad car, the Schneringer exited his truck and began "marching" back toward the officer's squad car. The officer then exited his squad car and began explaining that he stopped Schneringer because he had failed to signal. Schneringer responded that his signal was on. The Officer replied that maybe Schneringer's signal wasn't working. Schneringer then turned away from the officer and started back to his truck. The Officer commanded Schneringer to "Come back here" and to "Come back here right now." Schneringer took a few more steps and reached for the door handle of his truck. The officer ordered Schneringer not to return to the vehicle, and then immediately deployed his stun gun, dropping Schneringer to the ground. The officer claimed that as Schneringer lay on the ground, he stated, "I'll never do that s*** again, d***." These words led the Officer to believe that Schneringer was "More or less [making] an admission of guilt. He knowingly obstructed my performance." The interaction was captured on the officer's body worn camera, and the video was played during the Officer's trial testimony. Approximately 10 seconds elapsed between the Officer's initial contact with Schneringer and the officer tasing him. Approximately four seconds elapsed between the officer commanding Schneringer to return and the officer's deployment of his stun gun.

Schneringer testified that he was a truck driver and had been called in to run an extra load for his employer. Schneringer was traveling to work on the night of the traffic stop from his home in Missouri. On his way to work, he noticed a police car sitting near a light. After he passed by, he noticed in his rearview spot mirror that the patrol car exited his location and began to follow him. After making a left-hand turn at a four-way intersection, Schneringer pulled his truck over on the street. According to the defendant, the officer stopped his patrol car about 40 feet behind Schneringer's truck. Schneringer got out of his truck because the officer's emergency lights were not on. He walked toward the officer's vehicle, while the officer remained in the driver's seat. The defendant then had a brief discussion with the officer, who wanted to know why the defendant was in the area. Once the officer confirmed with the defendant that he was at his place of business, the officer then informed Schneringer that his blinker was not working. The officer activated his emergency lights and got out of his patrol car. Once the officer exited his patrol car, Schneringer turned slightly away from the officer and began walking back toward his truck to show the officer that the defendant's turn signal was working. Within the next four seconds, the officer commanded that Schneringer "stop," and the officer deployed his stun gun, dropping Schneringer to the ground. Schneringer testified that he did not hear the officer's commands at the time the officer ordered him not to return to his vehicle, and to stop. Schneringer reiterated that he was going back to his vehicle to show the officer that his turn signals were functioning properly. Following the conclusion of the proceedings, the jury began its deliberations. Schneringer was found guilty of obstructing a peace officer, pursuant to section 31-1 of the Criminal Code of 2012 (Code) (720 ILCS 5/31-1(a)). He was found not guilty of failure to signal. This appeal followed.

THE ARGUMENT: On appeal, Schneringer argued that the People failed to prove that he committed the offense of Obstructing a Peace Officer.

THE LAW: Under section 31-1(a) of the Code, the State was required to prove that the defendant committed a Class A misdemeanor, when he "knowingly resists or obstructs the performance by one known to the person to be a peace officer *** of any authorized act within his or her official capacity." 720 ILCS 5/31-1(a). According to the Appellate Court, the People were required to prove that: "(1) the defendant knowingly obstructed a peace officer; (2) that the officer was performing an authorized act in his official capacity; and (3) that the defendant knew he was a peace officer." The offense of "Obstruction of a Police Officer" requires that the defendant "knowingly" obstruct the officer. In defining this element of the offense, Illinois Courts have held that "the defendant must be consciously aware that his conduct is practically certain to cause the result." In other words, the defendant must know that his conduct would lead to an intended result.

ISSUE #1: *Did Schneringer know that he would be interfering with or hindering the Officer's performance of an authorized act, i.e., the traffic stop, when he walked back to his truck during their conversation*? **CONCLUSION: The Court of Appeals concluded that under the facts of this case, Schneringer would not have known that his conduct would interfere with the Officer's performance of his duties. REASONING:** The Court reasoned that in this case, Schneringer exited his truck, approached the officer, was told that he had failed to signal a turn. He was "tased" after not responding to the officer's commands, all within approximately 10 seconds. During that brief exchange of words, the defendant's action in returning to his truck was for the purpose of showing the officer that the blinkers worked. According to the Court, there is no evidence in this record, circumstantial or otherwise, that Schneringer was consciously aware that by showing the officer that the truck's blinkers were working, the defendant would obstruct the traffic stop. Rather, the appellate court concluded that Schneringer's conduct was meant to explain, or facilitate, the dispute regarding whether the blinkers were operational. Even viewing the evidence in the light most favorable to the prosecution, as required in this case, it reasoned that it could not conclude that Schneringer knowingly obstructed the Officer's traffic stop. **RESULT: The Court concluded that the People failed to prove that Schneringer "knowingly" obstructed the Officer.**

ISSUE #2: *Did the People prove that the Schneringer's conduct actually obstructed the Officer's traffic stop?* **CONCLUSION: The Court ruled that he did not. REASONING:** The Court reasoned that even if Schneringer could have anticipated that his conduct during a traffic stop somehow satisfied the "knowing" element, the second part of that phrase is whether there actually was "obstruction." According to the Court, the term "obstruction" was not specifically defined in the statute. Further, the Illinois Supreme Court has determined that the plain and ordinary meaning of the term "obstruct," to mean '1: to block up: stop up or close up: place an obstacle in or fill with obstacles or impediments to passing *** 2: to be or come in the way of: hinder from passing, action, or operation: IMPEDE ***.' " The Court found that the evidence in this case was insufficient to prove that the defendant knowingly obstructed the traffic stop. Although the officer testified he had been following the defendant for some distance, the traffic stop was only initiated for the alleged failure to signal, which the jury rejected. By the Officer's own account, the entire interaction between the time Schneringer exited his truck until he was dropped to the ground by the taser was 10 seconds. The video shows no more than four seconds occurred from the first command to stop until the officer tased Schneringer. The Appellate Court found that there was insufficient evidence that Schneringer materially impeded the officer's traffic stop and, likewise, found there was insufficient evidence to prove that he did so knowingly. Accordingly, it reversed Schneringer's conviction.

ISSUE #3: [The People argued that Schneringer's decision to turn and walk away from the officer, together with his repeated apologies after the officer deployed the stun gun, was sufficient to prove that he understood that he was expected to comply with the officer's commands and was therefore sufficient to support Schneringer's conviction for Obstructing a Peace Officer.] *Did this argument convince the Appellate Court to affirmed Schneringer's conviction?* **CONCLUSION: No. REASONING:** The appellate court reasoned that the body worn camera video, however, belied the People's claims and showed a traumatized man lying flat out on the pavement, with involuntary muscle movements, having just been subjected to an electroshock of great magnitude. [The assisting officer, during his testimony, described the stun gun as a "lethal weapon."] The Appellate Court found it "improbable" that Schneringer was knowingly making statements for the purpose of admitting to his obstructive behavior as he was writhing on the ground after being tased. In fact, the Court noted that Schneringer was adamant that his blinkers worked, and he maintained that position throughout trial. Therefore, the Court concluded that the fact that that Schneringer turned and walked away from the Officer and then, after being tased, allegedly apologized to the Officer for having obstructed his traffic stop was sufficient to support Schneringer's conviction for Obstructing a Peace Officer.

ISSUE #4: Could Schneringer again be prosecuted for Obstructing a Peace Officer following the reversal of his conviction? **CONCLUSION: The appellate court declared that the People were barred from re-trying Schneringer. REASONING:** The Court reasoned that the United States Constitution's fifth amendment double jeopardy clause provides that no person shall "be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy." U.S. Const., amend. V; Casler, 2020 IL 125117, In addition, the Illinois Constitution provides that no person shall "be twice put in jeopardy for the same offense." Ill. Const. 1970, art. I, § 10. The Court reasoned that in the context of double jeopardy, "When a reviewing court reverses a defendant's conviction on the sole ground that the evidence was insufficient to sustain the jury's verdict, the double jeopardy clause bars a retrial on the same charge, and the only proper remedy is a judgment of acquittal." For these reasons, the Appellate Court in this case simply reversed Schneringer's Obstructing a Peace Officer conviction without remanding this case back to the circuit court for further action. Since the People could not again bring Schneringer to trial for this offense, it simply was not necessary to remand this case back to the circuit court. The outright reversed of Schneringer's conviction was sufficient

RESULT: The Appellate Court reversed Schneringer's conviction for Obstructing a Peace Officer.

EDITOR'S NOTE: In most traffic stops, Officers are trained to require the occupants of a stopped vehicle to remain in the stopped vehicle. In this case, the Officer ordered Schneringer not to stay in his vehicle (or at least not return to his vehicle).

QUIZ QUESTIONS FOR THE MONTH OF DECEMBER – 2026

People v. Michael J. Schneringer, 2026 IL App (5th) 240726, October 10, 2026.

1. In order to convict a defendant of the offense of *Obstructing a Peace Officer*, the People must prove that the defendant knowingly acted to obstruct a peace officer.

   a. True.

   b. False.

2. In this case, the appellate court listed the three elements of the offense of Obstructing a Peace Officer. Which of the following is ***not*** one of those elements?

   a. defendant knowingly obstructed a peace officer;

   b. defendant knew he was not justified in obstructing the officer;

   c. the officer was performing an authorized act in his official capacity;

   d. defendant knew he was a peace officer.

3. Did the People prove that Schneringer knew that he would be interfering with or hindering the Officer's performance of an authorized act, i.e., the traffic stop, when he walked back to his truck during their conversation?

   a. Yes.

   b. No.

4. Did the People prove that the Schneringer's conduct actually obstructed the Officer's traffic stop?

   a. Yes.

   b. No.

QUIZ ANSWERS FOR THE MONTH OF DECEMBER – 2026

People v. Michael J. Schneringer, 2026 IL App (5th) 240726, October 10, 2026.

1. In order to convict a defendant of the offense of *Obstructing a Peace Officer*, the People must prove that the defendant knowingly acted to obstruct a peace officer.

   a. True. As this Court declared, "The offense of obstruction of a police officer requires that the defendant 'knowingly' obstruct the officer."

2. In this case, the appellate court listed the three elements of the offense of Obstructing a Peace Officer. Which of the following is ***not*** one of those elements?

   b. defendant knew he was not justified in obstructing the officer;

3. Did the People prove that Schneringer knew that he would be interfering with or hindering the Officer's performance of an authorized act, i.e., the traffic stop, when he walked back to his truck during their conversation?

   b. No. The Court of Appeals concluded that under the facts of this case, Schneringer would not have known that his conduct would interfere with the Officer's performance of his duties.

4. Did the People prove that the Schneringer's conduct actually obstructed the Officer's traffic stop?

   b. No. The Appellate Court found that there was insufficient evidence introduced to prove that Schneringer materially impeded the officer's traffic stop and, likewise, it found there was insufficient evidence to prove that he did so knowingly.