

Police use of force during arrest at Wairoa Police Station

OUTLINE OF EVENTS

1. On the morning of 21 January 2019, Mr Z's daughter told him another girl had stolen her mobile phone. Mr Z went to the other girl's house and spoke to her mother, Ms Y. After a brief discussion, Mr Z went to look for Ms Y's daughter in the Wairoa township.
2. While in the township, Mr Z again saw Ms Y. She told him she had the phone and to follow her in her van. Mr Z followed Ms Y in his car, and she drove to the Wairoa Police Station.
3. Ms Y entered the reception area of the Police station and told the officer behind the front counter, Custody Officer A, that Mr Z was following her. Mr Z then entered the station and yelled at Ms Y about his daughter's phone. After a brief exchange between the two, Ms Y left. Another member of the public, Ms X, was in the reception area waiting to speak to Police about an unrelated matter and watched what was going on.
4. Mr Z told Custody Officer A about the dispute over his daughter's phone. Officer B, who had heard Mr Z's raised voice, then entered the reception area from within the station to speak to Mr Z.
5. After interacting with Mr Z for around a minute and a half, during which Mr Z was said to be yelling abuse, Officer B arrested Mr Z for using offensive language. By now the custody sergeant, Officer C, had come to see what the noise was about. Officer B handcuffed Mr Z and led him out to the custody area of the station, accompanied by Officer D. In the custody area, the officers were also assisted by Officer E.
6. Officer B took Mr Z into a cell, and CCTV shows that he used his leg to flip Mr Z onto the concrete floor before leaving the cell.
7. Shortly after this, Mr Z told Custody Officer A that Officer B had assaulted him by banging him into the cell wall.

8. An hour and forty minutes after the arrest, Police released Mr Z with a formal warning. He returned to the station later that day to make a complaint against Officer B. Officer C took a statement from Mr Z and photographed some minor injuries he said he had received when being arrested and restrained.
9. Police notified the Authority on 24 January 2019 and the Authority independently investigated Mr Z's complaint.
10. Police also conducted its own investigation and found that Mr Z's arrest was lawful, and the force used was appropriate.

THE AUTHORITY'S INVESTIGATION

11. The Authority interviewed Custody Officer A, Officers B, C, D, and E, Mr Z and Ms X. Ms Y did not respond to the Authority's request for an interview. Mr Z also supplied a report from a doctor he visited the day after his arrest. Additionally, the Authority reviewed Officer B's Tactical Options Report regarding the incident, CCTV footage from the Police station, and documents generated by Police during their investigation of the complaint, including the photographs of Mr Z's injuries.¹
12. The Authority identified and considered the following issues:
 - 1) Was Officer B justified in arresting Mr Z?
 - 2) Was the force used by Officer B justified?

THE AUTHORITY'S FINDINGS

Issue 1: Was Officer B justified in arresting Mr Z?

13. Officer B said:
 - a) he approached Mr Z in the reception area and asked him what was going on;
 - b) Mr Z was "*ranting and raving*" in an agitated tone and a raised voice;
 - c) Ms X looked frightened and was backed up against a wall;
 - d) he asked Mr Z to lower his voice and calm down, but Mr Z instead began yelling abuse at him; and
 - e) he warned Mr Z at least three times that if he did not calm down, he would be arrested: "*I just thought that if I kept at him, he'd start to calm down, but nah, not this time*".

¹ An officer is required to complete a Tactical Options Report when he or she has used a certain level of force on a member of the public. The report includes each tactical option used, a description of the level of force used, and the reasons for using it.

14. In his Tactical Options Report, Officer B said that walking away and leaving Mr Z in the reception area was not an option because he believed that Mr Z posed a risk to the safety of Ms X and Ms Y. He told the Authority Mr Z was angry and was “*getting worse*”, so he arrested him.
15. Custody Officer A, Officer C and Officer D all reported witnessing Mr Z yelling at Officer B and seeing Ms X trying to keep away from him and looking intimidated.
16. The Authority viewed CCTV camera footage from the reception area of the Police station. The camera does not record sound, but Mr Z’s body language and gesturing appear consistent with the description of him yelling and behaving aggressively.
17. Officer B arrested Mr Z for ‘offensive behaviour or language’ under section 4 of the Summary Offences Act 1981.² The Authority is satisfied Mr Z was behaving in a way that justified his arrest under that section.
18. The Authority also considered whether the arrest could have been avoided had Officer B removed himself from the situation when it became clear that Mr Z did not want to deal with him. However, the Authority accepts it was not a viable option to leave Mr Z unattended in the reception area given his agitation.

FINDING ON ISSUE 1

Officer B was justified in arresting Mr Z.

Issue 2: Was the force used by Officer B justified?

19. It is accepted by all present that Officer B used force to move Mr Z from the reception area of the Police station to a cell following his arrest. However, Mr Z and the officers present have conflicting accounts of what happened.

Mr Z’s account

20. In his statement to Police and his interview with the Authority, Mr Z said that after he was arrested:
 - a) Officer B became aggressive once they went through the door from the reception area into a hallway. Mr Z saw there were no CCTV cameras in this area, and he believed Officer B knew this.
 - b) Officer B then unlocked one of the handcuffs and reapplied it against Mr Z’s wrist bone, squeezing it as hard as he could, deliberately causing Mr Z pain and leaving a mark that was visible for days.

² See paragraph 65

- c) Officer B tried to push Mr Z to the floor, but was unable to, so he put his leg out and used it to flip Mr Z onto the floor.
- d) Officer B then pushed his fist into the right side of Mr Z's jaw and 'screwed' his knuckles back and forth to cause him pain, saying "You gonna shut up?". Mr Z yelled and moved his head so Officer B's knuckles slid off his face, and Mr Z's face was scratched as he "dragged" it away against the floor.
- e) Officers A and B then picked Mr Z up from the ground and took him to the custody area. Once they were by the holding cell, Officer B took him just inside the door of the cell to an area Mr Z believed was not within view of a CCTV camera. Officer B again used his leg to flip him over and "slammed" him into a wall and down onto the concrete floor:

"He just slammed me, eh. There was no need. He should have just opened the door and just let me in, but he made it an issue to smack my head in, into the – it actually hit the wall first 'cos I was right by the wall and actually my head actually hit the wall then the floor."

- 21. The photographs Police took of Mr Z show a light scratch on his face running from his cheekbone to his jaw, red marks and possible swelling to his right wrist, bruising to his left shoulder and grazing to his knees.
- 22. Mr Z went to a doctor the following day who also noted bruising to his forehead and right wrist, and that Mr Z was complaining of pain to his forehead, neck, knees, lower back and the left side of his chest.

Police response to the allegations

Officer B

- 23. Officer B said that, when they got into the hallway, Mr Z continued to be abusive and started thrashing around and pushing away from him, so much so that Officer B was losing control of him. He said he used a 'leg sweep' to take Mr Z to the ground and gain control of him.
- 24. When asked whether he unlocked one of the handcuffs and deliberately squeezed it tighter, Officer B strongly denied this. In his Tactical Options Report, he had noted that he had been unable to 'double-lock' Mr Z's handcuffs because of Mr Z resisting, and that Mr Z was left with "red marks to his wrist where the handcuffs tightened during arrest process".³ Officer B explained at interview that when handcuffs have not been double-locked, they can become tighter if pushed up against something.
- 25. Officer B said that, once on the ground in the hallway, Mr Z turned his head towards him in a way that made Officer B believe that he was about to spit at him. He therefore considered Mr Z to be 'assaultive',⁴ and took immediate action to prevent Mr Z from being able to spit at him

³ Double-locking requires a key and stops ratcheted handcuffs from tightening.

⁴ 'Assaultive' includes someone who displays intent to cause harm, through body language/physical action.

by placing his closed fist on Mr Z's head, holding it against the floor, and telling him to calm down.

26. When asked why he used a closed fist, Officer B said he had learned to do this to avoid his fingers being bitten. He said he pushed Mr Z's head down and away from him with the heel of his palm. In response to Mr Z's allegation, he said: *"I definitely used my fist to hold him down... I did not drive my knuckle into him."* Officer B suggested any movement of his knuckles on Mr Z's face was due to Mr Z moving around.
27. Officer B said that while he was holding Mr Z's head down, he tried unsuccessfully to find a spit hood on his vest.⁵ He and Officer D then got Mr Z to his feet and took him to the custody area, during which he said Mr Z was *"kicking and thrashing his body about against our efforts to move him"*. Because of this, Officer B decided not to remove his handcuffs before putting him in a cell.
28. Officer B recalled that, once in the custody area, he and Officers B and D were struggling to search Mr Z and remove his shoes before putting him into a cell because he was still resisting, and Mr Z fell to the ground as a result.
29. Officer B said he then pushed Mr Z into the holding cell to create enough space to safely close the door, and Mr Z fell to the ground again. He said Mr Z got straight to his feet and began verbally abusing him again.
30. When Officer B was told that the CCTV appeared to show him using his leg to sweep Mr Z's leg out from under him and pushing him to the ground in the cell, and was asked why he did this, Officer B referred to his perceived cumulative assessment of Mr Z as being assaultive.⁶ He continued:

"I needed to create space between him and me so that I could safely close the door. That use of force also meant he had no opportunity to assault me by spitting or otherwise."

31. Officer B told the Authority he did not believe he carried out a leg sweep on Mr Z in the cell. He also did not remember Mr Z's head hitting the cell wall and said if this happened, it was probably *"self-propelled"*.
32. When asked about Mr Z's injuries, Officer B said these could have been caused by him thrashing around while being restrained.

Officer D

33. Officer D said he followed Officer B through the door from the reception area into the hallway and Mr Z continued to fight, struggle, and verbally abuse Officer B while he was trying to move

⁵ A spit hood is a restraint device intended to prevent someone from spitting or biting. The hood slips over a detainee's head. The bottom half is cloth, designed to prevent spitting. The top half is dark mesh so that officers may view the top half of the detainee's head.

⁶ The 'perceived cumulative assessment' (PCA) is a constable's subjective assessment, and continuous reassessment, of an incident using the TENR model, based on information known about the situation and the subject's behaviour.

him along. Officer D stayed behind them in case Mr Z broke free and tried to run elsewhere in the station.

34. He told the Authority Officer B took Mr Z to the ground because Mr Z became uncontrollable. He said Mr Z then turned his head up towards Officer B, and Officer B put his hand on Mr Z's face and pushed it away; he did not see Officer B moving his knuckles around. Officer D said Officer B told him afterwards that he had believed Mr Z was about to spit at him. He saw Officer B use his knuckles on Mr Z's face, and that this was to avoid being bitten. He said Mr Z was still "putting up a fight" and "kicking and screaming".
35. Officer D said Mr Z was picked up and walked to the custody area, still struggling and verbally abusing Officer B. Because of this behaviour, the officers decided it was too risky to remove Mr Z's handcuffs to search him, so they left them on, conducted the search, removed Mr Z's shoes, and put him into the holding cell.

Officer E

36. Officer E said he heard a lot of shouting coming from the custody area, so he went to see what was going on. He saw Officers A and B trying to control Mr Z, who was "struggling, abusive, threatening and non-compliant". Officer E helped by removing Mr Z's shoes, and Mr Z was then moved into the holding cell.
37. Officer E told the Authority:

"At no time did I see either [Officer B] or [Officer D] do anything that in my view was excessive and [they] only used as much force as was necessary to search the prisoner and place him in the holding cell in a safe manner."

CCTV footage

38. As noted by Mr Z, there is no CCTV camera in the hallway off the reception area of the Wairoa Police Station (those arriving in Police custody are not usually taken through the main reception).
39. CCTV footage from the custody area shows Officer B using an 'arm bar' hold to walk Mr Z to the area where Police usually search people.⁷ From there, and still applying the arm bar, Officer B leads Mr Z across to the area just outside the holding cell. Officer D accompanies them. Here Mr Z is again taken to the ground, face down.
40. Officers A and B continue to restrain Mr Z as Officer B searches Mr Z's head area before putting him in the cell. Another officer, Officer E, walks over and helps. The view of what is happening with Mr Z is momentarily obscured due to the camera positions. However, it appears Officer B is pulled off balance and steadies himself against the side of the cell.
41. Officer B then picks up Mr Z and again uses an 'arm bar' to walk him into the cell. Officer D remains in the doorway, observing, and Officer E is also nearby. Officer B then uses his left leg to sweep Mr Z's right leg backwards and flip him onto the concrete floor of the cell. Although

⁷ An 'arm bar' is an approved manual restraint technique which officers can use to control a person's movements.

the resulting movements of Mr Z are partly obscured from view due to the position of Officer B, the Authority considers this manoeuvre may have caused Mr Z's head to come into contact with the cell wall and floor before he gets back to his feet.

The Authority's view on the force used

42. The accounts of Officers B, D and E are sufficiently consistent for the Authority to conclude that a degree of force was necessary to restrain Mr Z when leading him from the reception area and into the holding cell.
43. Officer B did not double-lock Mr Z's handcuffs and this may have caused them to become tighter during his restraint. There is insufficient evidence to support Mr Z's allegation that Officer B deliberately tightened them to cause him pain.
44. Officer B has acknowledged that he used a 'leg sweep' to take Mr Z to the ground in the hallway, and the Authority is satisfied that CCTV shows that he also used his leg to flip Mr Z onto the concrete floor of the holding cell.
45. Officer B has also acknowledged pushing his fist down on Mr Z's face while Mr Z was on the floor in the hallway. However, there is a conflict between the accounts of Mr Z and Officer B regarding whether Officer B in using his fist to restrain Mr Z, turned his fist and drove his knuckles further into Mr Z's cheek. Officer B denied he did so, Officer D said he did not see this happen, and there is no CCTV footage. The Authority is unable to determine whether or not this happened. Mr Z received a scratch down his cheek, but it is possible this was caused by him continuing to struggle during one of the two occasions he was being restrained on the floor.
46. Further conflict arises between the accounts of Mr Z and Officer B regarding whether Mr Z's head hit the cell wall and floor. The Authority finds, on the balance of probabilities, that either or both of these things are likely to have occurred when Officer B used his leg to flip Mr Z onto the concrete floor of the cell.

Was the force used by Officer B justified?

Use of his leg to take Mr Z to the ground

47. Section 39 of the Crimes Act 1961 allows for Police officers to use reasonable force to carry out an arrest.⁸
48. After Officer B told Mr Z he was under arrest and began leading him to the custody area of the Police station, Mr Z began "thrashing" his body around and yelling abuse. In his Tactical Options Report, Officer B described Mr Z as "actively resisting arrest".
49. The Police Tactical Options Framework guides Police in determining the appropriate level of force to use in certain situations.⁹ The Authority accepts that Mr Z was actively resisting Officer

⁸ See paragraph 67

⁹ See paragraphs 67-75 for law and Police policy on use of force.

B in his attempt to take him into Police custody. In such circumstances, policy permits the use of pepper spray and 'empty hand tactics', such as physical restraint holds or strikes.

50. Officer B recorded in his Tactical Options Report that he considered using pepper spray but did not because they were inside and too close to each other, meaning the spray would likely have affected him and Officer D.
51. The Authority is satisfied that Officer B's use of force in the hallway in taking Mr Z to the ground using his leg was reasonable and proportionate in the circumstances and justified under section 39.
52. The Authority also accepts that a degree of force was reasonable and proportionate when Officers A and B were moving him from the hallway to the custody area and completing the necessary search before putting him in a cell.
53. Officer B said he took Mr Z to the ground once they were in the cell to maintain enough space between him and Mr Z so he could safely leave the cell and close the door without Mr Z trying to escape or assault him.
54. The Authority finds that this use of force by Officer B was unnecessary and likely caused Mr Z to hit his head on either the cell wall, floor, or both due to Mr Z still being handcuffed and therefore unable to put his arms out to break his fall. The Authority considers Officer B could have pushed Mr Z into the cell, without the need to flip him onto the concrete floor of the cell using his leg in the process, and should have done so.

Closed fist on Mr Z's face in hallway

55. Officer B said the reason he put his closed fist on Mr Z's head and held it against the floor was to defend himself from being spat at by Mr Z. Section 48 of the Crimes Act 1961 states:

"Everyone is justified in using, in the defence of himself or herself or another, such force as, in the circumstances as he or she believes them to be, it is reasonable to use."

56. To rely on this justification for his use of force, Officer B's action must be assessed on the following three questions:
 - 1) What did Officer B believe the circumstances to be at the time he put his fist on Mr Z's face and pushed his head away?
 - 2) In light of that belief, was Officer B's use of a closed fist on Mr Z's face for the purpose of defending himself?
 - 3) If it was, was Officer B's use of a closed fist on Mr Z's face reasonable in the circumstances as Officer B believed them to be?

What did Officer B believe the circumstances to be when he put his fist on Mr Z's face and pushed his head away?

57. Officer B said he believed Mr Z was about to spit at him because of the manner in which Mr Z turned his head towards him. Because of this, he assessed Mr Z to be 'assaultive'. He recorded in his Tactical Options Report that he took immediate action to prevent Mr Z from being able to spit at him, and he told the Authority he used a closed fist because he had been told by others in Police that officers had had their fingers bitten in similar circumstances.
58. Officer D also saw Mr Z turn his head up towards Officer B and said that after the incident Officer B told him of his belief that Mr Z had been about to spit at him.
59. Officer B told the Authority he tried to get a spit hood while he held Mr Z's head down but was unable to find one on his belt. This action is consistent with the view that Officer B was fearful of being spat at.
60. The Authority accepts that Officer B believed Mr Z was about to spit at him and was therefore assaultive. The Authority also accepts that Officer B believed Mr Z might bite his fingers if he used an open hand to push his face away.

In light of that belief, was Officer B's use of a closed fist on Mr Z's face for the purpose of defending himself?

61. In light of Officer B's belief that Mr Z was about to spit at him, the Authority accepts that when he placed his closed fist on Mr Z's face and pushed his head away, his primary aim was to defend himself from the possibility of Mr Z spitting at him.

Was Officer B's use of a closed fist on Mr Z's face reasonable in the circumstances as Officer B believed them to be?

62. The Authority is satisfied that Officer B placing a closed fist on Mr Z's face and pushing his head away was a practical and proportionate response to the threat he perceived, and that there were no less forceful tactical options available to him at that moment.

FINDINGS ON ISSUE 2

The force used by Officer B in taking Mr Z to the ground in the hallway using his leg was justified and proportionate.

The force used by Officer B in placing his closed fist on Mr Z's face and pushing his head away while he was on the ground in the hallway was justified and proportionate. The Authority is unable to determine whether Officer B turned his fist and drove his knuckles further into Mr Z's cheek as alleged by Mr Z.

The force used by Officer B in using his leg to flip Mr Z onto the concrete floor of the cell while he was still handcuffed was unnecessary and likely caused Mr Z to hit his head on either the cell wall, floor, or both.

CONCLUSIONS

63. The Authority concluded that Officer B was justified in arresting Mr Z.
64. The Authority also found that:
- 1) The force used by Officer B in taking Mr Z to the ground in the hallway using his leg was justified and proportionate to Mr Z's resistance.
 - 2) The force used by Officer B in placing his closed fist on Mr Z's face and pushing his head away while he was on the ground in the hallway was justified and proportionate, because he believed Mr Z was going to spit at him. The Authority was unable to determine whether Officer B turned his fist and drove his knuckles further into Mr Z's cheek, as alleged by Mr Z, due to conflicting accounts and a lack of other evidence.
 - 3) The force used by Officer B in using his leg to flip Mr Z onto the concrete floor of the cell while he was still handcuffed was unnecessary and likely caused Mr Z to hit his head on either the cell wall, floor, or both.



Judge Colin Doherty

Chair
Independent Police Conduct Authority

17 March 2020

IPCA: 18-1556

Summary Offences Act 1981

65. Section 4 of the Summary Offences Act relates to offensive behaviour or language and states that:

“(1) Every person is liable to a fine not exceeding \$1,000 who,—

(a) in or within view of any public place, behaves in an offensive or disorderly manner; or

(b) in any public place, addresses any words to any person intending to threaten, alarm, insult, or offend that person; or

(c) in or within hearing of a public place,—

(i) uses any threatening or insulting words and is reckless whether any person is alarmed or insulted by those words; or

(ii) addresses any indecent or obscene words to any person.

(2) Every person is liable to a fine not exceeding \$500 who, in or within hearing of any public place, uses any indecent or obscene words.

(3) In determining for the purposes of a prosecution under this section whether any words were indecent or obscene, the court shall have regard to all the circumstances pertaining at the material time, including whether the defendant had reasonable grounds for believing that the person to whom the words were addressed, or any person by whom they might be overheard, would not be offended.

(4) It is a defence in a prosecution under subsection (2) if the defendant proves that he had reasonable grounds for believing that his words would not be overheard.”

66. Section 39 states that any constable may arrest and take into custody without a warrant any person whom they have good cause to suspect of having committed an offence against any of the provisions of the Act (except sections 17 to 20, 25, and 32 to 38).

Law on the use of force

67. Section 39 of the Crimes Act 1961 provides for law enforcement officers to use reasonable force in the execution of their duties such as arrests and enforcement of warrants. Specifically, it provides that officers may use “*such force as may be necessary*” to overcome any force used in resisting the law enforcement process unless the process “*can be carried out by reasonable means in a less violent manner.*”

68. Section 48 of the Crimes Act states: *“Everyone is justified in using, in the defence of himself or herself or another, such force as, in the circumstances as he or she believes them to be, it is reasonable to use.”*
69. Under section 62 of the Act, anyone who is authorised by law to use force is criminally responsible for any excessive use of force.

Police Use of Force policy

70. The Police ‘Use of Force’ policy provides guidance to Police officers about the use of force. The policy sets out the options available to Police officers when responding to a situation. Police officers have a range of tactical options available to them to help de-escalate a situation, restrain a person, effect an arrest or otherwise carry out lawful duties. These include communication, mechanical restraints, empty hand techniques (such as physical restraint holds and arm strikes), OC spray, batons, Police dogs, Tasers and firearms.
71. Police policy provides a Tactical Options Framework for officers to assess, reassess, manage and respond to use of force situations, ensuring the response (use of force) is necessary and proportionate given the level of threat and risk to themselves and the public. Police refer to this as the TENR (Threat, Exposure, Necessity and Response) assessment.
72. Police officers must also constantly assess an incident based on information they know about the situation and the behaviour of the people involved; and the potential for de-escalation or escalation. The officer must choose the most reasonable option (use of force), given all the circumstances known to them at the time. This may include information on: the incident type, location and time; the Officer and subject’s abilities; emotional state, the influence of drugs and alcohol, and the presence or proximity of weapons; similar previous experiences; and environmental conditions. Police refer to this assessment as an officer’s Perceived Cumulative Assessment (PCA).
73. Wherever possible and appropriate, officers should use tactical communication throughout an incident, alone or with any other tactical options. Tactical communication is crucial to safely de-escalating an incident with uncooperative subjects. Tactical communication should be attempted in every incident where Police action is necessary in response to uncooperative subjects, including those that may require force to be used.
74. A key part of an officer’s decision to decide when, how, and at what level to use force depends on the actions of, or potential actions of, the people involved, and depends on whether they are: cooperative; passively resisting (refuses verbally or with physical inactivity); actively resisting (pulls, pushes or runs away); assaultive (showing an intent to cause harm, expressed verbally or through body language or physical action); or presenting a threat of grievous bodily harm or death to any person. Ultimately, the legal authority to use force is derived from the law and not from Police policy.

75. The policy states that any force must be considered, timely, proportionate and appropriate given the circumstances known at the time. Victim, public and Police safety always take precedence, and every effort must be taken to minimise harm and maximise safety.

ABOUT THE AUTHORITY

Who is the Independent Police Conduct Authority?

The Independent Police Conduct Authority is an independent body set up by Parliament to provide civilian oversight of Police conduct.

It is not part of the Police – the law requires it to be fully independent. The Authority is overseen by a Board, which is chaired by Judge Colin Doherty.

Being independent means that the Authority makes its own findings based on the facts and the law. It does not answer to the Police, the Government or anyone else over those findings. In this way, its independence is similar to that of a Court.

The Authority employs highly experienced staff who have worked in a range of law enforcement and related roles in New Zealand and overseas.

What are the Authority's functions?

Under the Independent Police Conduct Authority Act 1988, the Authority:

- receives complaints alleging misconduct or neglect of duty by Police, or complaints about Police practices, policies and procedures affecting the complainant in a personal capacity;
- investigates, where there are reasonable grounds in the public interest, incidents in which Police actions have caused or appear to have caused death or serious bodily harm.

On completion of an investigation, the Authority must form an opinion about the Police conduct, policy, practice or procedure which was the subject of the complaint. The Authority may make recommendations to the Commissioner.

This report

This report is the result of the work of a multi-disciplinary team of investigators, report writers and managers. At significant points in the investigation itself and in the preparation of the report, the Authority conducted audits of both process and content.



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