Chapter 9A.16 RCW
DEFENSES

Sections

9A.16.010 Definitions.
9A.16.020 Use of force—When lawful.
9A.16.025 Use of force—When unjustified—Victim identity.
9A.16.030 Homicide—When excusable.
9A.16.040 Justifiable homicide or use of deadly force by public officer, peace officer, person aiding—Good faith standard.
9A.16.046 Justifiable homicide or use of deadly force by peace officer—Reimbursement of defendant for costs—Special verdict.
9A.16.050 Homicide—By other person—When justifiable.
9A.16.060 Duress.
9A.16.070 Entrapment.
9A.16.080 Action for being detained on mercantile establishment premises for investigation—"Reasonable grounds" as defense.
9A.16.090 Intoxication.
9A.16.100 Use of force on children—Policy—Actions presumed unreasonable.
9A.16.110 Defending against violent crime—Reimbursement.
9A.16.120 Outdoor music festival, campground—Detention.
9A.16.900 Construction—Chapter applicable to state registered domestic partnerships—2009 c 521.

RCW 9A.16.010 Definitions. In this chapter, unless a different meaning is plainly required:

(1) "Necessary" means that no reasonably effective alternative to the use of force appeared to exist and that the amount of force used was reasonable to effect the lawful purpose intended.

(2) "Deadly force" means the intentional application of force through the use of firearms or any other means reasonably likely to cause death or serious physical injury. [1986 c 209 s 1; 1975 1st ex.s. c 260 s 9A.16.010.]

RCW 9A.16.020 Use of force—When lawful. The use, attempt, or offer to use force upon or toward the person of another is not unlawful in the following cases:

(1) Whenever necessarily used by a public officer in the performance of a legal duty, or a person assisting the officer and acting under the officer's direction;

(2) Whenever necessarily used by a person arresting one who has committed a felony and delivering him or her to a public officer competent to receive him or her into custody;

(3) Whenever used by a party about to be injured, or by another lawfully aiding him or her, in preventing or attempting to prevent an offense against his or her person, or a malicious trespass, or other malicious interference with real or personal property lawfully in his or her possession, in case the force is not more than is necessary;

(4) Whenever reasonably used by a person to detain someone who enters or remains unlawfully in a building or on real property lawfully in the possession of such person, so long as such detention is reasonable in duration and manner to investigate the reason for the detained person's presence on the premises, and so long as the premises in question did not reasonably appear to be intended to be open to members of the public;

(5) Whenever used by a carrier of passengers or the carrier's authorized agent or servant, or other person assisting them at their request in expelling from a carriage, railway car, vessel, or other vehicle, a passenger who refuses to obey a lawful and reasonable regulation prescribed for the conduct of passengers, if such vehicle has first been stopped and the force used is not more than is necessary to expel the offender with reasonable regard to the offender's personal safety;

(6) Whenever used by any person to prevent a mentally ill, mentally incompetent, or mentally disabled person from committing an act dangerous to any person, or in enforcing necessary restraint for the protection or restoration to health of the person, during such period only as is necessary to obtain legal authority for the restraint or custody of the person. [1986 c 149 s 2; 1979 ex.s. c 244 s 7; 1977 ex.s. c 80 s 13; 1975 1st ex.s. c 260 s 9A.16.020.]

Effective date—1979 ex.s. c 244: See RCW 9A.44.902.

Purpose—Intent—Severability—1977 ex.s. c 80: See notes following RCW 4.16.190.

RCW 9A.16.025 Use of force—When unjustified—Victim identity. A person is not justified in using force against another based on the discovery of, knowledge about, or potential disclosure of the victim's actual or perceived gender, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation, including under circumstances in which the victim made an unwanted nonforcible romantic or sexual advance towards the defendant, or in which the defendant and victim dated or had a romantic or sexual relationship. [2020 c 3 s 2.]

Short title—2020 c 3: See note following RCW 9A.08.040.

RCW 9A.16.030 Homicide—When excusable. Homicide is excusable when committed by accident or misfortune in doing any lawful act by lawful means, without criminal negligence, or without any unlawful intent. [1979 ex.s. c 244 s 8; 1975 1st ex.s. c 260 s 9A.16.030.]

Effective date—1979 ex.s. c 244: See RCW 9A.44.902.

RCW 9A.16.040 Justifiable homicide or use of deadly force by public officer, peace officer, person aiding—Good faith standard. (1) Homicide or the use of deadly force is justifiable in the following cases:

(a) When a public officer applies deadly force in obedience to the judgment of a competent court; or

(b) When necessarily used by a peace officer meeting the good faith standard of this section to overcome actual resistance to the execution of the legal process, mandate, or order of a court or officer, or in the discharge of a legal duty; or

(c) When necessarily used by a peace officer meeting the good faith standard of this section or person acting under the officer's command and in the officer's aid:

(i) To arrest or apprehend a person who the officer reasonably believes has committed, has attempted to commit, is committing, or is attempting to commit a felony;

(ii) To prevent the escape of a person from a federal or state correctional facility or in retaking a person who escapes from such a facility;

(iii) To prevent the escape of a person from a county or city jail or holding facility if the person has been arrested for, charged with, or convicted of a felony; or

(iv) To lawfully suppress a riot if the actor or another participant is armed with a deadly weapon.

(2) In considering whether to use deadly force under subsection (1)(c) of this section, to arrest or apprehend any person for the commission of any crime, the peace officer must have probable cause to believe that the suspect, if not apprehended, poses a threat of serious physical harm to the officer or a threat of serious physical harm to others. Among the circumstances which may be considered by peace officers as a "threat of serious physical harm" are the following:

(a) The suspect threatens a peace officer with a weapon or displays a weapon in a manner that could reasonably be construed as threatening; or

(b) There is probable cause to believe that the suspect has committed any crime involving the infliction or threatened infliction of serious physical harm.

Under these circumstances deadly force may also be used if necessary to prevent escape from the officer, where, if feasible, some warning is given, provided the officer meets the good faith standard of this section.

(3) A public officer covered by subsection (1)(a) of this section shall not be held criminally liable for using deadly force without malice and with a good faith belief that such act is justifiable pursuant to this section.

(4) A peace officer shall not be held criminally liable for using deadly force in good faith, where "good faith" is an objective standard which shall consider all the facts, circumstances, and information known to the officer at the time to determine whether a similarly situated reasonable officer would have believed that the use of deadly force was necessary to prevent death or serious physical harm to the officer or another individual.

(5) This section shall not be construed as:

(a) Affecting the permissible use of force by a person acting under the authority of RCW 9A.16.020 or 9A.16.050; or

(b) Preventing a law enforcement agency from adopting standards pertaining to its use of deadly force that are more restrictive than this section. [2019 c 4 s 3. Prior: 2019 c 1 s 7 (Initiative Measure No. 940); (2018 c 11 s 7 (Initiative Measure No. 940) repealed by 2019 c 4 s 8); (2018 c 10 s 3 repealed by 2019 c 4 s 8); 1986 c 209 s 2; 1975 1st ex.s. c 260 s 9A.16.040.]

Effective date—2019 c 4: See note following RCW 43.101.455.

Short title—Intent—Liberal construction—Subject—2019 c 1 (Initiative Measure No. 940): See notes following RCW 43.101.450.

Rule making—2019 c 4; 2019 c 1 (Initiative Measure No. 940): See note following RCW 43.101.455.

Legislative recognition: "The legislature recognizes that RCW 9A.16.040 establishes a dual standard with respect to the use of deadly force by peace officers and private citizens, and further recognizes that private citizens' permissible use of deadly force under the authority of RCW 9.01.200, 9A.16.020, or 9A.16.050 is not restricted and remains broader than the limitations imposed on peace officers." [1986 c 209 s 3.]

RCW 9A.16.046 Justifiable homicide or use of deadly force by peace officer—Reimbursement of defendant for costs—Special verdict. (1) When a peace officer who is charged with a crime is found not guilty or charges are dismissed by reason of justifiable homicide or use of deadly force under RCW 9A.16.040, or by reason of self-defense, for actions taken while on duty or otherwise within the scope of his or her authority as a peace officer, the state of Washington shall reimburse the defendant for all reasonable costs, including loss of time, legal fees incurred, and other expenses involved in his or her defense. This reimbursement is not an independent cause of action.

(2) If the trier of fact makes a determination of justifiable homicide, justifiable use of deadly force, or self-defense, the judge shall determine the amount of the award.

(3) Whenever the issue of justifiable homicide, justifiable use of deadly force, or self-defense under this section is decided by a judge, or whenever charges against a peace officer are dismissed based on the merits, the judge shall consider the same questions as must be answered in the special verdict under subsection (4) of this section.

(4) Whenever the issue of justifiable homicide, justifiable use of deadly force, or self-defense under this section has been submitted to a jury, and the jury has found the defendant not guilty, the court shall instruct the jury to return a special verdict in substantially the following form:

		answer yes or no
1.	Was the defendant on duty or otherwise acting within the scope of his or her authority as a peace officer?	.....
2.	Was the finding of not guilty based upon justifiable homicide, justifiable use of deadly force, or self-defense?	.....

(5) Nothing in this section precludes the legislature from using the sundry claims process to grant an award where none was granted under this section or otherwise where the charge was dismissed prior to trial, or to grant a higher award than one granted under this section. [2019 c 4 s 7.]

Effective date—2019 c 4: See note following RCW 43.101.455.

RCW 9A.16.050 Homicide—By other person—When justifiable. Homicide is also justifiable when committed either:

(1) In the lawful defense of the slayer, or his or her husband, wife, parent, child, brother, or sister, or of any other person in his or her presence or company, when there is reasonable ground to apprehend a design on the part of the person slain to commit a felony or to do some great personal injury to the slayer or to any such person, and there is imminent danger of such design being accomplished; or

(2) In the actual resistance of an attempt to commit a felony upon the slayer, in his or her presence, or upon or in a dwelling, or other place of abode, in which he or she is. [2011 c 336 s 354; 1975 1st ex.s. c 260 s 9A.16.050.]

RCW 9A.16.060 Duress. (1) In any prosecution for a crime, it is a defense that:

(a) The actor participated in the crime under compulsion by another who by threat or use of force created an apprehension in the mind of the actor that in case of refusal he or she or another would be liable to immediate death or immediate grievous bodily injury; and

(b) That such apprehension was reasonable upon the part of the actor; and

(c) That the actor would not have participated in the crime except for the duress involved.

(2) The defense of duress is not available if the crime charged is murder, manslaughter, or homicide by abuse.

(3) The defense of duress is not available if the actor intentionally or recklessly places himself or herself in a situation in which it is probable that he or she will be subject to duress.

(4) The defense of duress is not established solely by a showing that a married person acted on the command of his or her spouse. [1999 c 60 s 1; 1975 1st ex.s. c 260 s 9A.16.060.]

RCW 9A.16.070 Entrapment. (1) In any prosecution for a crime, it is a defense that:

(a) The criminal design originated in the mind of law enforcement officials, or any person acting under their direction, and

(b) The actor was lured or induced to commit a crime which the actor had not otherwise intended to commit.

(2) The defense of entrapment is not established by a showing only that law enforcement officials merely afforded the actor an opportunity to commit a crime. [1975 1st ex.s. c 260 s 9A.16.070.]

RCW 9A.16.080 Action for being detained on mercantile establishment premises for investigation—"Reasonable grounds" as defense. In any criminal action brought by reason of any person having been detained on or in the immediate vicinity of the premises of a mercantile establishment for the purpose of investigation or questioning as to the ownership of any merchandise, it shall be a defense of such action that the person was detained in a reasonable

manner and for not more than a reasonable time to permit such investigation or questioning by a peace officer, by the owner of the mercantile establishment, or by the owner's authorized employee or agent, and that such peace officer, owner, employee, or agent had reasonable grounds to believe that the person so detained was committing or attempting to commit theft or shoplifting on such premises of such merchandise. As used in this section, "reasonable grounds" shall include, but not be limited to, knowledge that a person has concealed possession of unpurchased merchandise of a mercantile establishment, and a "reasonable time" shall mean the time necessary to permit the person detained to make a statement or to refuse to make a statement, and the time necessary to examine employees and records of the mercantile establishment relative to the ownership of the merchandise. [1975 1st ex.s. c 260 s 9A.16.080.]

RCW 9A.16.090 Intoxication. No act committed by a person while in a state of voluntary intoxication shall be deemed less criminal by reason of his or her condition, but whenever the actual existence of any particular mental state is a necessary element to constitute a particular species or degree of crime, the fact of his or her intoxication may be taken into consideration in determining such mental state. [2011 c 336 s 355; 1975 1st ex.s. c 260 s 9A.16.090.]

RCW 9A.16.100 Use of force on children—Policy—Actions presumed unreasonable. (1) It is the policy of this state to protect children from assault and abuse and to encourage parents and their authorized agents to use methods of correction and restraint of children that are not dangerous to the children. However, the physical discipline of a child is not unlawful when it is reasonable and moderate and is inflicted by a parent or guardian for purposes of restraining or correcting the child. Any use of force on a child by any other person is unlawful unless it either: (a) Is reasonable and moderate and is authorized in advance by the child's parent or guardian for purposes of restraining or correcting the child; or (b) when occurring in an educational setting and involving an educator, actually or substantially complies with limitations on the use of student isolation and restraint under RCW 28A.600.485 including that it is used only when a student's behavior poses an imminent likelihood of serious harm.

(2) The following actions are presumed unreasonable when used to correct or restrain a child: (a) Throwing, kicking, burning, or cutting a child; (b) striking a child with a closed fist; (c) shaking a child under age three; (d) interfering with a child's breathing; (e) threatening a child with a deadly weapon; or (f) doing any other act that is likely to cause and which does cause bodily harm greater than transient pain or minor temporary marks. The age, size, and condition of the child and the location of the injury shall be considered when determining whether the bodily harm is reasonable or moderate. This list is illustrative of unreasonable actions and is not intended to be exclusive. [2024 c 219 s 6; 1986 c 149 s 1.]

RCW 9A.16.110 Defending against violent crime—Reimbursement. (1) No person in the state shall be placed in legal jeopardy of any

kind whatsoever for protecting by any reasonable means necessary, himself or herself, his or her family, or his or her real or personal property, or for coming to the aid of another who is in imminent danger of or the victim of assault, robbery, kidnapping, arson, burglary, rape, murder, or any other violent crime as defined in RCW 9.94A.030.

(2) When a person charged with a crime listed in subsection (1) of this section is found not guilty by reason of self-defense, the state of Washington shall reimburse the defendant for all reasonable costs, including loss of time, legal fees incurred, and other expenses involved in his or her defense. This reimbursement is not an independent cause of action. To award these reasonable costs the trier of fact must find that the defendant's claim of self-defense was sustained by a preponderance of the evidence. If the trier of fact makes a determination of self-defense, the judge shall determine the amount of the award.

(3) Notwithstanding a finding that a defendant's actions were justified by self-defense, if the trier of fact also determines that the defendant was engaged in criminal conduct substantially related to the events giving rise to the charges filed against the defendant the judge may deny or reduce the amount of the award. In determining the amount of the award, the judge shall also consider the seriousness of the initial criminal conduct.

Nothing in this section precludes the legislature from using the sundry claims process to grant an award where none was granted under this section or to grant a higher award than one granted under this section.

(4) Whenever the issue of self-defense under this section is decided by a judge, the judge shall consider the same questions as must be answered in the special verdict under subsection (4) [(5)] of this section.

(5) Whenever the issue of self-defense under this section has been submitted to a jury, and the jury has found the defendant not guilty, the court shall instruct the jury to return a special verdict in substantially the following form:

		answer yes or no
1.	Was the finding of not guilty based upon self-defense?	.....
2.	If your answer to question 1 is no, do not answer the remaining question.	
3.	If your answer to question 1 is yes, was the defendant:	
a.	Protecting himself or herself?	.....
b.	Protecting his or her family?	.....
c.	Protecting his or her property?	.....
d.	Coming to the aid of another who was in imminent danger of a heinous crime?	.....
e.	Coming to the aid of another who was the victim of a heinous crime?	.....
f.	Engaged in criminal conduct substantially related to the events giving rise to the crime with which the defendant is charged?	.....

[1995 c 44 s 1; 1989 c 94 s 1; 1977 ex.s. c 206 s 8. Formerly RCW 9.01.200.]

Use of deadly force—Legislative recognition: See note following RCW 9A.16.040.

RCW 9A.16.120 Outdoor music festival, campground—Detention. (1) In a criminal action brought against the detainer by reason of a person having been detained on or in the immediate vicinity of the premises of an outdoor music festival or related campground for the purpose of pursuing an investigation or questioning by a law enforcement officer as to the lawfulness of the consumption or possession of alcohol or illegal drugs, it is a defense that the detained person was detained in a reasonable manner and for not more than a reasonable time to permit the investigation or questioning by a law enforcement officer, and that a peace officer, owner, operator, employee, or agent of the outdoor music festival had reasonable grounds to believe that the person so detained was unlawfully consuming or attempting to unlawfully consume or possess, alcohol or illegal drugs on the premises.

(2) For the purposes of this section:

(a) "Illegal drug" means a controlled substance under chapter 69.50 RCW for which the person detained does not have a valid prescription or that is not being consumed in accordance with the prescription directions and warnings, or a legend drug under chapter 69.41 RCW for which the person does not have a valid prescription or that is not being consumed in accordance with the prescription directions and warnings.

(b) "Outdoor music festival" has the same meaning as in RCW 70.108.020, except that no minimum time limit is required.

(c) "Reasonable grounds" include, but are not limited to:

(i) Exhibiting the effects of having consumed liquor, which means that a person has the odor of liquor on his or her breath, or that by speech, manner, appearance, behavior, lack of coordination, or otherwise exhibits that he or she has consumed liquor, and either:

(A) Is in possession of or in close proximity to a container that has or recently had liquor in it; or

(B) Is shown by other evidence to have recently consumed liquor; or

(ii) Exhibiting the effects of having consumed an illegal drug, which means that a person by speech, manner, appearance, behavior, lack of coordination, or otherwise exhibits that he or she has consumed an illegal drug, and either:

(A) Is in possession of an illegal drug; or

(B) Is shown by other evidence to have recently consumed an illegal drug.

(d) "Reasonable time" means the time necessary to permit the person detained to make a statement or to refuse to make a statement, and the time necessary to allow a law enforcement officer to determine the lawfulness of the consumption or possession of alcohol or illegal drugs. "Reasonable time" may not exceed one hour. [2003 c 219 s 1.]

RCW 9A.16.900 Construction—Chapter applicable to state registered domestic partnerships—2009 c 521. For the purposes of this chapter, the terms spouse, marriage, marital, husband, wife, widow, widower, next of kin, and family shall be interpreted as applying equally to state registered domestic partnerships or

individuals in state registered domestic partnerships as well as to marital relationships and married persons, and references to dissolution of marriage shall apply equally to state registered domestic partnerships that have been terminated, dissolved, or invalidated, to the extent that such interpretation does not conflict with federal law. Where necessary to implement chapter 521, Laws of 2009, gender-specific terms such as husband and wife used in any statute, rule, or other law shall be construed to be gender neutral, and applicable to individuals in state registered domestic partnerships. [2009 c 521 s 22.]