

**CHAPTER 776**  
**JUSTIFIABLE USE OF FORCE**

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**776.012 Use or threatened use of force in defense of person.—**

(1) A person is justified in using or threatening to use force, except deadly force, against another when and to the extent that the person reasonably believes that such conduct is necessary to defend himself or herself or another against the other's imminent use of unlawful force. A person who uses or threatens to use force in accordance with this subsection does not have a duty to retreat before using or threatening to use such force.

(2) A person is justified in using or threatening to use deadly force if he or she reasonably believes that using or threatening to use such force is necessary to prevent imminent death or great bodily harm to himself or herself or another or to prevent the imminent commission of a forcible felony. A person who uses or threatens to use deadly force in accordance with this subsection does not have a duty to retreat and has the right to stand his or her ground if the person using or threatening to use the deadly force is not engaged in a criminal activity and is in a place where he or she has a right to be.

History.—s. 13, ch. 74-383; s. 1188, ch. 97-102; s. 2, ch. 2005-27; s. 3, ch. 2014-195.

**776.013 Home protection; use or threatened use of deadly force; presumption of fear of death or great bodily harm.—**

(1) A person is presumed to have held a reasonable fear of imminent peril of death or great bodily harm to himself or herself or another when using or threatening to use defensive force that is intended or likely to cause death or great bodily harm to another if:

(a) The person against whom the defensive force was used or threatened was in the process of unlawfully and forcefully entering, or had unlawfully and forcibly entered, a dwelling, residence, or occupied vehicle, or if that person had removed or was attempting to remove another against that person's will from the dwelling, residence, or occupied vehicle; and

(b) The person who uses or threatens to use defensive force knew or had reason to believe that an unlawful and forcible entry or unlawful and forcible act was occurring or had occurred.

(2) The presumption set forth in subsection (1) does not apply if:

(a) The person against whom the defensive force is used or threatened has the right to be in or is a lawful resident of the dwelling, residence, or vehicle, such as an owner, lessee, or titleholder, and there is not an injunction for protection from domestic violence or a written pretrial supervision order of no contact against that person; or

(b) The person or persons sought to be removed is a child or grandchild, or is otherwise in the lawful custody or under the lawful guardianship of, the person against whom the defensive force is used or threatened; or

(c) The person who uses or threatens to use defensive force is engaged in a criminal activity or is using the dwelling, residence, or occupied vehicle to further a criminal activity; or

(d) The person against whom the defensive force is used or threatened is a law enforcement officer, as defined in s. 943.10(14), who enters or attempts to enter a dwelling, residence, or vehicle in the performance of his or her official duties and the officer identified himself or herself in accordance with any applicable law or the person using or threatening to use force knew or reasonably should have known that the person entering or attempting to enter was a law enforcement officer.

(3) A person who is attacked in his or her dwelling, residence, or vehicle has no duty to retreat and has the right to stand his or her ground and use or threaten to use force, including deadly force, if he or she uses or threatens to use force in accordance with s. 776.012(1) or (2) or s. 776.031(1) or (2).

(4) A person who unlawfully and by force enters or attempts to enter a person's dwelling, residence, or occupied vehicle is presumed to be doing so with the intent to commit an unlawful act involving force or violence.

(5) As used in this section, the term:

(a) "Dwelling" means a building or conveyance of any kind, including any attached porch, whether the building or conveyance is temporary or permanent, mobile or immobile, which has a roof over it, including a tent, and is designed to be occupied by people lodging therein at night.

(b) "Residence" means a dwelling in which a person resides either temporarily or permanently or is visiting as an invited guest.

(c) “Vehicle” means a conveyance of any kind, whether or not motorized, which is designed to transport people or property.

History.—s. 1, ch. 2005-27; s. 4, ch. 2014-195.

**776.031 Use or threatened use of force in defense of property.—**

(1) A person is justified in using or threatening to use force, except deadly force, against another when and to the extent that the person reasonably believes that such conduct is necessary to prevent or terminate the other’s trespass on, or other tortious or criminal interference with, either real property other than a dwelling or personal property, lawfully in his or her possession or in the possession of another who is a member of his or her immediate family or household or of a person whose property he or she has a legal duty to protect. A person who uses or threatens to use force in accordance with this subsection does not have a duty to retreat before using or threatening to use such force.

(2) A person is justified in using or threatening to use deadly force only if he or she reasonably believes that such conduct is necessary to prevent the imminent commission of a forcible felony. A person who uses or threatens to use deadly force in accordance with this subsection does not have a duty to retreat and has the right to stand his or her ground if the person using or threatening to use the deadly force is not engaged in a criminal activity and is in a place where he or she has a right to be.

History.—s. 13, ch. 74-383; s. 1189, ch. 97-102; s. 3, ch. 2005-27; s. 5, ch. 2014-195.

**776.032 Immunity from criminal prosecution and civil action for justifiable use or threatened use of force.—**

(1) A person who uses or threatens to use force as permitted in s. 776.012, s. 776.013, or s. 776.031 is justified in such conduct and is immune from criminal prosecution and civil action for the use or threatened use of such force by the person, personal representative, or heirs of the person against whom the force was used or threatened, unless the person against whom force was used or threatened is a law enforcement officer, as defined in s. 943.10(14), who was acting in the performance of his or her official duties and the officer identified himself or herself in accordance with any applicable law or the person using or threatening to use force knew or reasonably should have known that the person was a law enforcement officer. As used in this subsection, the term “criminal prosecution” includes arresting, detaining in custody, and charging or prosecuting the defendant.

(2) A law enforcement agency may use standard procedures for investigating the use or threatened use of force as described in subsection (1), but the agency may not arrest the person for using or threatening to use force unless it determines that there is probable cause that the force that was used or threatened was unlawful.

(3) The court shall award reasonable attorney’s fees, court costs, compensation for loss of income, and all expenses incurred by the defendant in defense of any civil action brought by a plaintiff if the court finds that the defendant is immune from prosecution as provided in subsection (1).

History.—s. 4, ch. 2005-27; s. 6, ch. 2014-195.

**776.041 Use or threatened use of force by aggressor.**—The justification described in the preceding sections of this chapter is not available to a person who:

- (1) Is attempting to commit, committing, or escaping after the commission of, a forcible felony; or
- (2) Initially provokes the use or threatened use of force against himself or herself, unless:
  - (a) Such force or threat of force is so great that the person reasonably believes that he or she is in imminent danger of death or great bodily harm and that he or she has exhausted every reasonable means to escape such danger other than the use or threatened use of force which is likely to cause death or great bodily harm to the assailant; or
  - (b) In good faith, the person withdraws from physical contact with the assailant and indicates clearly to the assailant that he or she desires to withdraw and terminate the use or threatened use of force, but the assailant continues or resumes the use or threatened use of force.

History.—s. 13, ch. 74-383; s. 1190, ch. 97-102; s. 7, ch. 2014-195.

**776.05 Law enforcement officers; use of force in making an arrest.**—A law enforcement officer, or any person whom the officer has summoned or directed to assist him or her, need not retreat or desist from efforts to make a lawful arrest because of resistance or threatened resistance to the arrest. The officer is justified in the use of any force:

- (1) Which he or she reasonably believes to be necessary to defend himself or herself or another from bodily harm while making the arrest;
- (2) When necessarily committed in retaking felons who have escaped; or
- (3) When necessarily committed in arresting felons fleeing from justice. However, this subsection shall not constitute a defense in any civil action for damages brought for the wrongful use of deadly force unless the use of deadly force was necessary to prevent the arrest from being defeated by such flight and, when feasible, some warning had been given, and:
  - (a) The officer reasonably believes that the fleeing felon poses a threat of death or serious physical harm to the officer or others; or
  - (b) The officer reasonably believes that the fleeing felon has committed a crime involving the infliction or threatened infliction of serious physical harm to another person.

History.—s. 13, ch. 74-383; s. 1, ch. 75-64; s. 1, ch. 87-147; s. 54, ch. 88-381; s. 1191, ch. 97-102.

**776.051 Use or threatened use of force in resisting arrest or making an arrest or in the execution of a legal duty; prohibition.**—

- (1) A person is not justified in the use or threatened use of force to resist an arrest by a law enforcement officer, or to resist a law enforcement officer who is engaged in the execution of a legal duty, if the law enforcement officer was acting in good faith and he or she is known, or reasonably appears, to be a law enforcement officer.

(2) A law enforcement officer, or any person whom the officer has summoned or directed to assist him or her, is not justified in the use of force if the arrest or execution of a legal duty is unlawful and known by him or her to be unlawful.

**History.**—s. 13, ch. 74-383; s. 1192, ch. 97-102; s. 1, ch. 2008-67; s. 8, ch. 2014-195.

**776.06 Deadly force by a law enforcement or correctional officer.**—

(1) As applied to a law enforcement officer or correctional officer acting in the performance of his or her official duties, the term “deadly force” means force that is likely to cause death or great bodily harm and includes, but is not limited to:

(a) The firing of a firearm in the direction of the person to be arrested, even though no intent exists to kill or inflict great bodily harm; and

(b) The firing of a firearm at a vehicle in which the person to be arrested is riding.

(2)(a) The term “deadly force” does not include the discharge of a firearm by a law enforcement officer or correctional officer during and within the scope of his or her official duties which is loaded with a less-lethal munition. As used in this subsection, the term “less-lethal munition” means a projectile that is designed to stun, temporarily incapacitate, or cause temporary discomfort to a person without penetrating the person’s body.

(b) A law enforcement officer or a correctional officer is not liable in any civil or criminal action arising out of the use of any less-lethal munition in good faith during and within the scope of his or her official duties.

**History.**—s. 13, ch. 74-383; s. 1, ch. 99-272; s. 9, ch. 2014-195.

**776.07 Use of force to prevent escape.**—

(1) A law enforcement officer or other person who has an arrested person in his or her custody is justified in the use of any force which he or she reasonably believes to be necessary to prevent the escape of the arrested person from custody.

(2) A correctional officer or other law enforcement officer is justified in the use of force, including deadly force, which he or she reasonably believes to be necessary to prevent the escape from a penal institution of a person whom the officer reasonably believes to be lawfully detained in such institution under sentence for an offense or awaiting trial or commitment for an offense.

**History.**—s. 13, ch. 74-383; s. 7, ch. 95-283; s. 1193, ch. 97-102.

**776.08 Forcible felony.**—“Forcible felony” means treason; murder; manslaughter; sexual battery; carjacking; home-invasion robbery; robbery; burglary; arson; kidnapping; aggravated assault; aggravated battery; aggravated stalking; aircraft piracy; unlawful throwing, placing, or discharging of a destructive device or bomb; and any other felony which involves the use or threat of physical force or violence against any individual.

**History.**—s. 13, ch. 74-383; s. 4, ch. 75-298; s. 289, ch. 79-400; s. 5, ch. 93-212; s. 10, ch. 95-195.

**776.085 Defense to civil action for damages; party convicted of forcible or attempted forcible felony.—**

(1) It shall be a defense to any action for damages for personal injury or wrongful death, or for injury to property, that such action arose from injury sustained by a participant during the commission or attempted commission of a forcible felony. The defense authorized by this section shall be established by evidence that the participant has been convicted of such forcible felony or attempted forcible felony, or by proof of the commission of such crime or attempted crime by a preponderance of the evidence.

(2) For the purposes of this section, the term “forcible felony” shall have the same meaning as in s. 776.08.

(3) Any civil action in which the defense recognized by this section is raised shall be stayed by the court on the motion of the civil defendant during the pendency of any criminal action which forms the basis for the defense, unless the court finds that a conviction in the criminal action would not form a valid defense under this section.

(4) In any civil action where a party prevails based on the defense created by this section:

(a) The losing party, if convicted of and incarcerated for the crime or attempted crime, shall, as determined by the court, lose any privileges provided by the correctional facility, including, but not limited to:

1. Canteen purchases;
2. Telephone access;
3. Outdoor exercise;
4. Use of the library; and
5. Visitation.

(b) The court shall award a reasonable attorney’s fee to be paid to the prevailing party in equal amounts by the losing party and the losing party’s attorney; however, the losing party’s attorney is not personally responsible if he or she has acted in good faith, based on the representations of his or her client. If the losing party is incarcerated for the crime or attempted crime and has insufficient assets to cover payment of the costs of the action and the award of fees pursuant to this paragraph, the party shall, as determined by the court, be required to pay by deduction from any payments the prisoner receives while incarcerated.

(c) If the losing party is incarcerated for the crime or attempted crime, the court shall issue a written order containing its findings and ruling pursuant to paragraphs (a) and (b) and shall direct that a certified copy be forwarded to the appropriate correctional institution or facility.

History.—s. 1, ch. 87-187; s. 72, ch. 96-388.

**776.09 Retention of records pertaining to persons found to be acting in lawful self-defense; expunction of criminal history records.—**

(1) Whenever the state attorney or statewide prosecutor dismisses an information, indictment, or other charging document, or decides not to file an information, indictment, or other charging document because of a finding that the person accused acted in lawful self-defense pursuant to the provisions related to the justifiable use of force in this chapter, that finding shall be documented in writing and retained in the files of the state attorney or statewide prosecutor.

(2) Whenever a court dismisses an information, indictment, or other charging document because of a finding that the person accused acted in lawful self-defense pursuant to the provisions related to the justifiable use of force in this chapter, that finding shall be recorded in an order or memorandum, which shall be retained in the court's records.

(3) Under either condition described in subsection (1) or subsection (2), the person accused may apply for a certificate of eligibility to expunge the associated criminal history record, pursuant to s. 943.0585(5), notwithstanding the eligibility requirements prescribed in s. 943.0585(1)(b) or (2).