

# Joseph Gabriel: Tasing risked serious consequences

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(Photo: My View )

Residents in Frenchtown are justifiably angry about the recent confrontation between Viola Young and the Tallahassee Police Department. There is a lot for them to be angry about.

When the police began arresting members of her family for walking in the road on Dunn Street — a street with no sidewalks — they escalated what was, at worst, a minor infraction into a major problem. After the arrests started, Young walked up to Officer Terry Mahan and asked what was going on. Mahan told her she was also under arrest. When Young turned around and walked away, Mahan tasered her in the back. She then fell face first onto the asphalt.

Think about that for a moment.

The incident was captured on video by Pouchon Richard and has since made national news. If you haven't watched the video yet, you should. Tony Davis, another man who recorded portions of the encounter, said one of the officers threatened to pepper-spray him. Keep in mind that it is perfectly legal to record police at any time

and for any reason. "I think he was mad because I was videoing the whole thing and because of the comments I was making — that they didn't have to tase her," Davis told the Democrat. "I understand them trying to protect and serve ... but you can't just go around tasing grandmas."

He's right. Viola Young is 61 years old. Falls are very dangerous to older people. In fact, falls are the leading cause of injury-related death among people over 65. In other words, falls are dangerous. They kill a lot of people.

When people fall, they risk breaking something — a hip or vertebrae, for example. People can also hit their heads on the ground, which can lead to concussions and internal bleeding. These and other types of injuries can lead directly to death, but they also can send people to the hospital where other problems can occur, such as unintended infections. Or they can lead to significant changes in a person's lifestyle, which can then bring other types of risks.

If an elderly man who lives alone sprains his ankle in a fall, for example, he might not eat enough because of trouble getting to the kitchen to cook. This might make him lightheaded and cause him to fall again, or it might make his diabetes worse, or otherwise put his health at risk.

Of course, most people are not injured when they fall, or they recover relatively quickly when they do get injured. But the older you are, the easier it is to get hurt when you fall and the more difficult it is to recover. That's why falls are the leading cause of emergency room visits among people over 65, and that's why they account for about 30 percent of all injury-related deaths among the elderly. It is why, when elderly people fall and break a hip, 20 percent of them die as a result of the injury within a year. As one article published in the scientific journal *Injury* recently put it, "Falls mortality remains an alarming public health problem, especially among the elderly."

Viola Young isn't quite 65 yet, so her risk of death from falling face-first onto the pavement is lower than these statistics indicate. But probably not by much. That's why, when I watched the video of her getting tasered, my first thought was: I hope she survives that fall.

Residents of Frenchtown are not the only ones who should be angry regarding this incident. We all should be. Yes, Viola Young may have been disobeying Officer Mahan. Does that justify endangering her life? As far as I know, Young did not suffer any life-threatening injuries when she collapsed on the pavement. But it is not always easy to tell what is life-threatening and what is not, and sometimes it can take a long time for the significance of even minor injuries to become apparent.

When Mahan tasered Viola Young, he put her life at risk. She could have died from that fall. If she sustained any injuries from it, she still might.

That should not be acceptable.

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