

- VEST FIRST RESPONDER -

HELP FOR HEROES

KENTUCKY

Self-Defense Law Reference Guide

*Stand Your Ground | Castle Doctrine (Dwelling, Vehicle, Place of Work) | Self-Defense | First Responder
Protections | Police Use of Force*

CERTIFIED TRAINER SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENT

Intended exclusively for VEST Certified Trainers. Not a substitute for legal counsel.

Kentucky is a Stand Your Ground state. KRS 503.050 explicitly states that 'a person does not have a duty to retreat prior to the use of deadly physical force.' Kentucky's Castle Doctrine (KRS 503.055) creates a statutory presumption of reasonable fear in the dwelling, residence, and occupied vehicle, and extends protections to the place of work. Kentucky also provides both criminal and civil immunity for justified force and limits the ability to arrest persons claiming self-defense.

STATUTE	SUBJECT MATTER
KRS 503.050	Use of Physical Force in Self-Protection - Stand Your Ground, No Duty to Retreat
KRS 503.055	Use of Defensive Force Regarding Dwelling, Residence, or Occupied Vehicle - Castle Doctrine
KRS 503.060	Defense of Another Person
KRS 503.080	Use of Force by Aggressor - Limitations
KRS 503.085	Criminal and Civil Immunity for Justified Force
KRS 508.025	Assault 3rd Degree - Enhanced When Victim Is Peace Officer or EMS Provider
KRS 508.030	Assault 4th Degree - Enhanced Penalty for Attacks on First Responders
Kentucky POST Standards	Police Use of Force - Neck Restraint Policy

PART I: THE KENTUCKY SELF-DEFENSE STATUTORY FRAMEWORK

KRS 503.050 - Use of Physical Force in Self-Protection (Stand Your Ground)

"The use of physical force by a defendant upon another person is justifiable when the defendant believes that such force is necessary to protect himself against the use or imminent use of unlawful physical force by the other person... A person does not have a duty to retreat prior to the use of deadly physical force." - KRS 503.050(1), (4)

Deadly force is justifiable under KRS 503.050(2) when the defendant believes such force is necessary to protect themselves against death, serious physical injury, kidnapping, sexual intercourse compelled by force or threat, or a felony involving the use of force. Kentucky uses a subjective belief standard ('believes') but courts evaluate objective reasonableness of that belief.

KEY ELEMENTS:

- Believes - subjective standard, but evaluated for objective reasonableness by the jury.
- Imminent use of unlawful physical force - threat must be immediate.
- No duty to retreat - explicit statutory language; applies at any lawful location.
- Deadly force threshold: death, serious physical injury, kidnapping, sexual assault compelled by force, or forcible felony.

FOR FIRST RESPONDERS:

KRS 503.050's explicit 'no duty to retreat' language - combined with the broad Castle Doctrine in KRS 503.055 - gives Kentucky EMS and fire personnel among the strongest statutory self-defense protections in the region. A Kentucky first responder attacked at any scene may use justified force without any retreat obligation. Kentucky also provides pre-trial immunity under KRS 503.085.

KRS 503.055 - Use of Defensive Force in Dwelling, Residence, or Occupied Vehicle

"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 forcibly 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." - KRS 503.055(2)

Kentucky's Castle Doctrine creates a PRESUMPTION of reasonable fear in three locations: dwelling, residence, and occupied vehicle. The prosecutions must overcome this presumption. Kentucky additionally extends Castle Doctrine principles to the place of work - persons in their place of work are not required to retreat before using justified defensive force.

- Dwelling - home, apartment, or fixed residential structure.
- Residence - any temporary residence including hotels and extended stays.
- Occupied Vehicle - any motor vehicle, including an ambulance or fire apparatus.
- Place of Work - no duty to retreat in one's workplace (incorporated through statutory and case law).

AMBULANCE AS OCCUPIED VEHICLE:

KRS 503.055's Castle Doctrine presumption explicitly covers occupied vehicles. A violent forced entry into a Kentucky ambulance activates this presumption - the prosecution must prove the defender's belief of reasonable fear was NOT justified. Combined with Kentucky's general no-duty-to-retreat rule under KRS 503.050, Kentucky EMS crews have comprehensive legal protection when attacked in or near their vehicles.

KRS 503.085 - Criminal and Civil Immunity

Kentucky provides immunity from criminal prosecution and civil action for persons who use justified force under KRS 503.050, 503.055, and related provisions. A person who uses force that is justified under these statutes cannot be criminally prosecuted or civilly sued for that use of force. The statute also creates a pre-trial immunity hearing process and limits the circumstances under which law enforcement may arrest a person asserting a justified self-defense claim.

PART II: DUTY TO RETREAT - KENTUCKY'S POSITION

Kentucky has NO duty to retreat. KRS 503.050(4) uses clear, direct language: 'A person does not have a duty to retreat prior to the use of deadly physical force.' This provision has been part of Kentucky law since 2006.

- No retreat required anywhere - at any lawful location, including any EMS or fire scene.
- Applies to both self-defense and defense of others under KRS 503.060.
- Castle Doctrine presumption provides ADDITIONAL statutory protection in the dwelling, residence, vehicle, and workplace.
- Criminal and civil immunity available for justified force under KRS 503.085.
- Exception: Initial aggressors who provoked the confrontation cannot claim the no-retreat right unless they clearly withdraw.

PART III: FIRST RESPONDER ASSAULT - ENHANCED CRIMINAL PROTECTIONS

KRS 508.025 - Assault in the Third Degree (Enhanced for Peace Officers and EMS)

Kentucky's assault statutes provide enhanced penalties when the victim is a peace officer, firefighter, or emergency medical services provider engaged in official duties. Assault in the Third Degree (causing physical injury) when committed against a peace officer or EMT on duty is elevated to a Class D Felony (1-5 years). This is an important enhancement - without the first-responder element, third-degree assault would be a misdemeanor.

KRS 508.030 - Assault in the Fourth Degree (Enhanced for First Responders)

Assault in the Fourth Degree (intentionally causing physical injury) becomes a Class A misdemeanor (up to 12 months) when committed against any protected class member, including first responders, engaged in official duties. Combined with the Class D Felony enhancement for more serious injuries, Kentucky creates a layered system of escalating consequences for attacks on EMS and fire personnel.

TRAINER EMPHASIS:

Kentucky's first-responder assault enhancements convert what would otherwise be misdemeanor conduct into felony offenses when the victim is an on-duty first responder. The 'engaged in official duties' element is satisfied by operating in uniform, in a marked vehicle, or in any clearly identified EMS or fire capacity. VEST trainers should ensure participants understand the full escalation: the same physical act that would be a misdemeanor against a civilian becomes a felony when directed at them while on duty.

PART IV: POLICE USE OF FORCE & NECK RESTRAINT FRAMEWORK

Kentucky does NOT have a statewide statutory chokehold ban comparable to Minnesota, California, Colorado, or Delaware. Police neck restraint policy is governed by the Kentucky Law Enforcement Council (KLEC) and individual agency use-of-force policies.

- NO statewide statutory chokehold or carotid restraint ban as of 2024-2025.
- KLEC training standards classify neck restraints as high-risk techniques subject to the deadly force justification standard.
- Individual Kentucky agencies may adopt additional restrictions; some larger departments have administratively banned chokeholds.
- Kentucky's immunity and self-defense framework is strong but does not include a standalone police neck restraint statute.

FIRST RESPONDERS VS. LAW ENFORCEMENT:

Kentucky's law enforcement use-of-force standards do not apply to civilian EMS and fire personnel in personal self-defense. A Kentucky paramedic or firefighter using a defensive technique in lawful self-defense is evaluated under KRS 503.050 only. There is no statutory restriction on civilian Kentucky first responders using any defensive technique in genuine life-safety self-defense.

PART V: APPLYING VEST PRINCIPLES UNDER KENTUCKY LAW**1. No Duty to Retreat - Anywhere You Operate**

KRS 503.050(4)'s explicit no-retreat language gives every Kentucky first responder the right to stand their ground at any lawful scene. VEST training reinforces this right through scenario-based decision making and the graduated force continuum. The no-duty-to-retreat rule is not a license to escalate - it means that when force becomes necessary, a provider need not put themselves at greater risk by attempting to flee.

2. Ambulance and Workplace Presumption

KRS 503.055's Castle Doctrine presumption covers occupied vehicles and extends to the workplace through statutory and case law. An EMS crew attacked in their Kentucky ambulance activates the presumption of reasonable fear. VEST compartment security and vehicle safety protocols support the factual record for this protection.

3. De-Escalation Documents Proportionality and Reasonableness

Even with Stand Your Ground protection and pre-trial immunity, Kentucky's 'believes necessary' standard requires proportionality. VEST Level I de-escalation curriculum creates the record that force was a last resort, supporting both the KRS 503.050 justification and the KRS 503.085 immunity claim.

4. Partner Defense Is Fully Covered

KRS 503.060 authorizes force to protect a third person under the same standards as self-defense. VEST Level III partner defense training is directly grounded in this statute. Kentucky's immunity provisions cover defense of others as well as self-defense.

5. Know When Force Ends

Kentucky's force standard requires that force be 'necessary to protect' - once the threat ends, the necessity ends. VEST's continuous threat reassessment curriculum is both operationally and legally essential. Force continuing after neutralization defeats the KRS 503.050 justification and the KRS 503.085 immunity.

LEGAL DISCLAIMER

This document is produced by VEST First Responder LLC for educational and trainer development purposes only. It does not constitute legal advice. Kentucky Revised Statutes Chapter 503 are subject to legislative amendment, and individual incidents are always fact-specific. VEST Certified Trainers and their agencies should consult with a licensed attorney, their medical director, and agency legal counsel before developing or delivering formal use-of-force or defensive tactics policies.