

- VEST FIRST RESPONDER -

HELP FOR HEROES

MICHIGAN

Self-Defense Law Reference Guide

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

CERTIFIED TRAINER SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENT

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

Michigan's self-defense laws underwent a comprehensive overhaul with the Michigan Self-Defense Act (2006), codified primarily in MCL 780.951-780.974. The Act codified Stand Your Ground principles, established the Castle Doctrine with a presumption covering dwelling, business, and occupied vehicle, and created immunity from both criminal prosecution and civil liability for justified defensive force. Michigan is among the more protective states for first responders, with an explicit Castle Doctrine presumption across all three key operational environments: home, workplace, and vehicle.

STATUTE	SUBJECT MATTER
MCL 780.951	Castle Doctrine - Presumption in Dwelling, Business, or Occupied Vehicle
MCL 780.972	Michigan Self-Defense Act - Stand Your Ground; Deadly Force Standard
MCL 780.973	Immunity from Civil Liability for Justified Force
MCL 780.974	Immunity from Criminal Prosecution for Justified Force
MCL 750.81d	Assault, Battery, Resistance, Obstruction of Person Performing Duty - Felony
MCL 750.81d(2)-(4)	Tiered Penalty Structure Based on Injury Severity
Michigan State Police Use-of-Force Policy	Chokehold Prohibited Except When Deadly Force Authorized

PART I: THE MICHIGAN SELF-DEFENSE STATUTORY FRAMEWORK

MCL 780.972 - Michigan Self-Defense Act (Stand Your Ground)

"An individual who has not or is not engaged in the commission of a crime at the time he or she uses deadly force may use deadly force against another individual anywhere he or she has the legal right to be with no duty to retreat if either of the following applies: (a) The individual honestly and reasonably believes that the use of deadly force is necessary to prevent the imminent death of or imminent great bodily harm to himself or herself or to another individual. (b) The individual honestly and reasonably believes that the use of deadly force is necessary to prevent the imminent sexual assault of himself or herself or of another individual." - MCL 780.972(1)

Michigan's Stand Your Ground standard requires both an honest belief (subjective) AND a reasonable belief (objective) - the 'honest and reasonable belief' formulation. This dual-test standard is slightly different from states that use only 'reasonable belief.' Both prongs must be satisfied. The law applies anywhere a person has a legal right to be, provided they are not engaged in criminal activity.

KEY ELEMENTS:

- Honest AND reasonable belief - dual standard: the actor must genuinely believe force was necessary, and that belief must be objectively reasonable.
- Imminent death or great bodily harm - the threat must be immediate.
- Anywhere they have a legal right to be - Stand Your Ground applies at all lawful locations.
- Not engaged in criminal activity - persons committing crimes lose Stand Your Ground protection.

FOR FIRST RESPONDERS:

MCL 780.972 gives every Michigan EMS provider and firefighter the right to stand their ground at any lawful location - including any emergency scene, any patient location, any roadway scene. The 'honest and reasonable belief' standard is assessed from the actor's perspective at the moment of the incident. VEST training helps providers develop the observational skills and decision-making framework to satisfy both the subjective and objective prongs of this standard.

MCL 780.951 - Castle Doctrine (Dwelling, Business, and Occupied Vehicle)

"An individual who uses deadly force or force other than deadly force in self-defense or in defense of another individual in either of the following circumstances is presumed to have acted with the honest and reasonable belief that the use of that force was necessary to prevent the imminent death of, or imminent great bodily harm to, himself or herself or another individual: (a) The individual against whom the force is used is in the process of breaking and entering a dwelling or business premises or committing home invasion... (b) The individual against whom the force is used has broken and entered a dwelling or business premises or committed home invasion and is still present in the dwelling or business premises..." - MCL 780.951(1)

Michigan's Castle Doctrine presumption covers dwelling, business premises, and occupied vehicle - three locations that encompass the full operational environment of Michigan EMS and fire responders. The presumption applies when the person using force reasonably believes the intruder is unlawfully entering or has unlawfully entered. This statutory presumption shifts the burden to the prosecution.

- Dwelling - home, apartment, or residential structure.
- Business premises - fire station, EMS base, hospital, or any business/workplace setting.
- Occupied vehicle - ambulance, fire apparatus, or occupied motor vehicle.

AMBULANCE, STATION, AND BUSINESS ALL COVERED:

Michigan's MCL 780.951 Castle Doctrine presumption covers three of the most critical environments for EMS and fire responders. An attack on an occupied ambulance, a violent intrusion at a fire station, or a forced entry into any business premises where a first responder is working all trigger the same statutory presumption. Combined with Stand Your Ground under MCL 780.972, Michigan provides comprehensive legal protection across the full operational spectrum.

MCL 780.973-780.974 - Criminal and Civil Immunity

Michigan provides immunity from civil liability (MCL 780.973) and immunity from criminal prosecution (MCL 780.974) for persons who use force that is justified under the Michigan Self-Defense Act. These dual immunity provisions mean that a first responder who uses proportionate, documented, lawful defensive force cannot be sued civilly or prosecuted criminally for that use of force.

PART II: DUTY TO RETREAT - MICHIGAN'S POSITION

Michigan has NO duty to retreat. MCL 780.972 explicitly states that a person 'with no duty to retreat' may use deadly force anywhere they have a legal right to be. This applies at every lawful location, including any EMS or fire scene.

- No retreat required anywhere a person is lawfully present and not engaged in criminal activity.
- Castle Doctrine presumption provides ADDITIONAL statutory protection in the dwelling, business premises, and occupied vehicle.
- Criminal and civil immunity available for justified force under MCL 780.973 and 780.974.
- Exception: Persons engaged in criminal activity or not lawfully present lose Stand Your Ground protection.
- Exception: Initial aggressors who provoked the confrontation may lose the protection unless they clearly withdraw.

PART III: FIRST RESPONDER ASSAULT - ENHANCED CRIMINAL PROTECTIONS

MCL 750.81d - Assault, Battery, Obstruction of Person Performing Duty

MCL 750.81d is Michigan's comprehensive first-responder protection statute. It criminalizes assaulting, battering, wounding, resisting, obstructing, opposing, or endangering any person the actor knows or has reason to know is performing their official duties. The statute covers law enforcement officers, firefighters, emergency medical service personnel, search and rescue workers, and other designated officials.

"An individual who assaults, batters, wounds, resists, obstructs, opposes, or endangers a person who the individual knows or has reason to know is performing his or her duties is guilty of a felony." - MCL 750.81d(1)

TIERED PENALTY STRUCTURE:

- Basic offense (no resulting injury): Felony, up to 2 years / \$2,000 fine.
- Bodily injury requiring medical attention: Felony, up to 4 years / \$5,000 fine.
- Serious impairment of body function: Felony, up to 15 years / \$10,000 fine.
- Death of first responder: Felony, up to 20 years / \$20,000 fine.

Critical: even the BASE offense - assaulting, obstructing, or opposing a first responder WITHOUT any resulting injury - is a FELONY in Michigan. There is no misdemeanor tier when the victim is a first responder performing duties. The 'knows or has reason to know' element is satisfied by uniform, marked vehicle, or any visible EMS/fire identification.

MICHIGAN'S NO-INJURY FELONY THRESHOLD:

MCL 750.81d's baseline offense - even without any bodily injury - is a felony. This is operationally significant: simply obstructing, opposing, or endangering a first responder performing their duties is a felony. Any physical contact escalates into a higher felony tier immediately. VEST trainers should communicate this clearly: there is no misdemeanor equivalent for obstruction or assault of an on-duty Michigan first responder.

PART IV: POLICE USE OF FORCE & NECK RESTRAINT FRAMEWORK

Michigan does not have a statewide statutory chokehold ban comparable to Minnesota, California, Colorado, or Delaware. Neck restraint policy is governed by the Michigan Commission on Law Enforcement Standards (MCOLES) training standards and individual agency use-of-force policies. The Michigan State Police has adopted a specific policy restricting chokeholds.

Michigan State Police Use-of-Force Policy

"MSP policy prohibits the use of chokeholds except when deadly force would be otherwise authorized. The prohibition on choke holds includes grabbing or striking a person's throat or kneeling or standing on a person's neck." - Michigan State Police Use of Force Policy

MSP's policy restricts chokeholds to deadly-force situations only, and its definition is broader than many states - explicitly including kneeling or standing on a person's neck (a direct response to high-profile incidents). However, this is an agency POLICY rather than a state STATUTE, which means it does not carry the same criminal enforcement mechanism as Delaware's felony statute or Colorado's SB 20-217.

- NO statewide statutory chokehold ban as of 2024-2025.
- Michigan State Police: Chokeholds prohibited except when deadly force authorized; includes kneeling/standing on neck.
- MCOLES training standards address high-risk force techniques.
- Other Michigan agencies may have varying policies; no statewide mandate.

FIRST RESPONDERS VS. LAW ENFORCEMENT:

Michigan's law enforcement use-of-force policies do not apply to civilian EMS and fire personnel in personal self-defense. A Michigan paramedic or firefighter defending their life is evaluated under MCL 780.972 and the Michigan Self-Defense Act only. There is no statutory restriction on civilian Michigan first responders using any defensive technique in genuine life-safety self-defense.

PART V: APPLYING VEST PRINCIPLES UNDER MICHIGAN LAW

1. Honest and Reasonable Belief - Both Prongs Matter

Michigan's 'honest and reasonable belief' standard requires BOTH subjective belief and objective reasonableness. VEST training prepares providers on both dimensions: the Level I observational and threat-recognition curriculum builds the genuine belief component; the graduated force continuum and scenario training documents that the belief was objectively reasonable under the circumstances.

2. Business Premises and Vehicle Both Carry the Presumption

MCL 780.951's Castle Doctrine presumption covers business premises and occupied vehicles - directly covering fire stations, EMS bases, and ambulances. VEST station security and compartment security protocols support the factual record for these presumptions.

3. No Injury Required for a Felony - Communicate This

MCL 750.81d's no-injury felony baseline is Michigan's most important first-responder protection provision for deterrence. Any physical obstruction, opposition, or endangerment of an on-duty first responder is a felony before the first injury occurs. VEST trainers should communicate this reality clearly and frequently.

4. De-Escalation Documents the Honest Belief Prong

VEST Level I de-escalation curriculum creates the record of genuine attempt to resolve situations without force - supporting both the honesty prong (the provider truly tried to avoid force) and the reasonableness prong (a reasonable person in the same situation would have exhausted these alternatives first).

5. Partner Defense Is Covered Under MCL 780.972(1)(a)

MCL 780.972 explicitly covers defense of another individual under the same honest-and-reasonable-belief standard. VEST Level III partner defense training is directly grounded in this statute. Both the subjective and objective prongs apply to defense of others as well as self-defense.

6. Know When Force Ends - Dual Immunity Requires Clean Records

MCL 780.973 and 780.974 immunity covers force used in justified self-defense. Once the threat ends, force must stop. VEST's continuous threat reassessment curriculum is legally essential. Michigan's dual immunity is only available for force that meets the 'honest and reasonable belief' standard throughout the entire incident.

LEGAL DISCLAIMER

This document is produced by VEST First Responder LLC for educational and trainer development purposes only. It does not constitute legal advice. Michigan Compiled Laws (MCL) 780.951-780.974; MCL 750.81d 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.

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