

ASSAULT AND BATTERY

G.L. c. 265, § 13A

I. INTENTIONAL ASSAULT AND BATTERY

The defendant is charged with having committed an intentional assault and battery upon [alleged victim] .

In order to prove that the defendant is guilty of having committed an intentional assault and battery, the Commonwealth must prove three things beyond a reasonable doubt:

First: That the defendant touched the person of [alleged victim] , without having any right or excuse for doing so;

Second: That the defendant intended to touch [alleged victim] ; and

Third: That the touching was *either* likely to cause bodily harm to [alleged victim] , **or** was offensive and done without (his) (her) consent.

If additional language on intent is appropriate.

As I

mentioned before, to prove an intentional assault and battery, the Commonwealth must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant *intended* to

touch [alleged victim] , in the sense that the defendant consciously and deliberately intended the touching to occur, and that the touching was not merely accidental or negligent. The Commonwealth is not required to prove that the defendant specifically intended to cause injury to [alleged victim] .

A touching is offensive and without consent when it amounts to an unprivileged and unjustified affront to the alleged victim’s integrity.

If the touching was indirect. A touching may be direct, as when a person strikes another, or it may be indirect as when a person sets in motion some force or instrumentality that strikes another.

The model instruction does not separately define assault, since “[e]very battery includes an assault” as a lesser included offense. *Commonwealth v. Burke*, 390 Mass. 480, 482 (1983); see *Commonwealth v. Porro*, 458 Mass. 526, 533-35 (2010). If the evidence would also permit a jury finding of simple assault, the jury should be instructed on lesser included offenses (Instruction 2.280), followed by Instruction 6.120 (Assault), beginning with the second paragraph.

Commonwealth v. Ford, 424 Mass. 709, 711 (1997) (assault and battery is a general intent crime and does not require specific intent to injure the victim, but its intentional branch requires an intentional touching, and not merely an intentional act resulting in a touching); *Burke*, 390 Mass. at 482-83, 487 (any touching likely to cause bodily harm is a battery regardless of consent, but an offensive but

nonharmful battery requires lack of consent or inability to consent); *Commonwealth v. McCan*, 277 Mass. 199, 203 (1931) (“An assault and battery is the intentional and unjustified use of force upon the person of another, however slight, or the intentional doing of a wanton or grossly negligent act causing personal injury to another”); accord *Commonwealth v. Bianco*, 390 Mass. 254, 263 (1983) (same); *Commonwealth v. Campbell*, 352 Mass. 387, 397 (1967) (same); *Commonwealth v. Musgrave*, 38 Mass. App. Ct. 519, 521 (1995) (approving instruction for threatened-battery branch of assault that “when we say intentionally we mean that [defendant] did so consciously and voluntarily and not by accident, inadvertence or mistake”), *aff’d*, 421 Mass. 610 (1996); *Commonwealth v. Moore*, 36 Mass. App. Ct. 455, 457-60 (1994) (intentional branch of assault and battery requires proof “that the defendant intended that a touching occur” and not merely “proof that the defendant did some intentional act, the result of which was a touching of the victim”); *Commonwealth v. Ferguson*, 30 Mass. App. Ct. 580, 584 (1991) (intentional branch of assault and battery requires proof “that the defendant’s conduct was intentional, in the sense that it did not happen accidentally”); see *Commonwealth v. Bianco*, 388 Mass. 358, 366-367 (1983) (assault and battery by joint venture); *Commonwealth v. Collberg*, 119 Mass. 350, 353 (1876) (mutual consent is no defense to cross-complaints of assault and battery; “such license is void, because it is against the law”).

II. RECKLESS ASSAULT AND BATTERY

A. *If intentional assault and battery was already charged on.*

There is a

second way in which a person may be guilty of an assault and battery. Instead of intentional conduct, it involves reckless conduct that results in bodily injury.

B. *If intentional assault and battery was not already charged on.*

The

defendant is charged with having committed an assault and battery upon _____ [alleged victim] _____ by reckless conduct.

In order to prove that the defendant is guilty of having committed an assault and battery by reckless conduct, the Commonwealth must prove two things beyond a reasonable doubt:

First: That the defendant intentionally engaged in actions which caused bodily injury to [alleged victim] . The injury must be sufficiently serious to interfere with the alleged victim's health or comfort. It need not be permanent, but it must be more than trifling. For example, an act that only shakes up a person or causes only momentary discomfort would not be sufficient.

And **second:** That the defendant's actions amounted to reckless conduct.

It is not enough for the Commonwealth to prove that the defendant acted negligently — that is, acted in a way that a reasonably careful person would not. It must be shown that the defendant's actions went beyond mere negligence and amounted to recklessness. The defendant acted recklessly if (he) (she) knew, or should have known, that such actions were very likely to cause substantial harm to someone, but (he) (she) ran that risk and went ahead anyway.

The defendant must have intended (his) (her) acts which resulted in the touching, in the sense that those acts did not happen accidentally.

If relevant to the evidence. **If you find that the defendant's acts occurred by accident, then you must find the defendant not guilty.**

But it is not necessary that (he) (she) intended to injure or strike the alleged victim, or that (he) (she) foresaw the harm that resulted. If the defendant actually realized in advance that (his) (her) conduct was very likely to cause substantial harm and decided to run that risk, such conduct would of course be reckless. But even if (he) (she) was not conscious of the serious danger that was inherent in such conduct, it is still reckless conduct if a reasonable person, under the circumstances as they were known to the defendant, would have recognized that such actions were so dangerous that it was very likely that they would result in substantial injury.

Commonwealth v. Burno, 396 Mass. 622, 625-627 (1986) (“the intentional commission of a wanton or reckless act (something more than gross negligence) causing physical or bodily injury to another”; injury must have “interfered with the health or comfort of the victim. It need not have been permanent, but it must have been more than transient and trifling. For example, if an alleged victim were shaken up but by his own admission not injured, or if an alleged victim were to have a sore wrist for only a few minutes, the ‘injury’ in each instance would be transient and trifling at most.”) (citation omitted); *Commonwealth v. Welch*, 16 Mass. App. Ct. 271, 273-77 (“The law recognizes . . . an alternative form of assault and battery in which proof of a wilful, wanton and reckless act which results in personal injury to another substitutes for . . . intentional conduct”; elements are [1] that the act involved a high degree of likelihood that substantial harm would result to another, and [2] that the victim suffered

physical injury as a result of that act), *rev. denied*, 390 Mass. 1102 (1983); see also *Commonwealth v. Grey*, 399 Mass. 469, 472 n.4 (1987) (“The standard of wanton or reckless conduct is at once subjective and objective’ It depends on what the defendant knew (subjective) and how a reasonable person would have acted (objective) knowing those facts.”) (quoting *Commonwealth v. Welansky*, 316 Mass. 383, 398 (1944)); *Commonwealth v. Godin*, 374 Mass. 120, 129 (1977) (standard “is at once both a subjective and objective standard, and is based in part on the knowledge of facts which would cause a reasonable man to know that a danger of serious harm exists. Such knowledge has its roots in experience, logic, and common sense, as well as in formal legal standards.”); *Commonwealth v. Welansky*, 316 Mass. 383, 399 (1944) (“Wanton or reckless conduct amounts to what has been variously described as indifference to or disregard of probable consequences”).

SUPPLEMENTAL INSTRUCTION

Victim injured while escaping.

The defendant may be convicted of assault and battery if the Commonwealth has proved beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant caused [alleged victim] reasonably to fear an immediate attack from the defendant, which then led (him) (her) to try to (escape) (or) (defend) (himself) (herself) from the defendant, and in doing so injured (himself) (herself).

Commonwealth v. Parker, 25 Mass. App. Ct. 727, 731, 734, *rev. denied*, 402 Mass. 1104 (1988).

NOTES:

1. **No verdict slip or specific unanimity instruction required where both intentional and reckless assault and battery are alleged.** Where the evidence warrants instructing on both intentional assault and battery and reckless assault and battery, the jurors need not be unanimous on whether the assault and battery was intentional or reckless. The judge, therefore, need not give a specific unanimity instruction or provide verdict slips for the jury to indicate the basis of its verdict. *Commonwealth v. Mistretta*, 84 Mass. App. Ct. 906, 906-07, *rev. denied*, 466 Mass. 1108 (2013). This is because “the forms of assault and battery are . . . closely related subcategories of the same crime.” *Id.* at 907. “Specific unanimity is not required, because they are not ‘separate, distinct, and essentially

unrelated ways in which the same crime can be committed.’” *Id.* (quoting *Commonwealth v. Santos*, 440 Mass. 281, 288 (2003)).

2. **Abuse prevention order admissible in evidence.** In a prosecution for assault and battery, a judge may admit evidence of prior circumstances under which the alleged victim had obtained an abuse prevention order under G.L. c. 209A against the defendant. While such evidence is not admissible to show bad character or propensity to commit the assault and battery, it is admissible to provide a full picture of the attack, which otherwise might have appeared as an essentially inexplicable act of violence. *Commonwealth v. Leonardi*, 413 Mass. 757, 762-64 (1992).

3. **Assault and battery on public employees.** General Laws c. 265, § 13D provides, “Whoever commits an assault and battery upon any public employee when such person is engaged in the performance of his duties at the time of such assault and battery, shall be punished” This offense contains two elements in addition to those required for assault and battery: (1) that the victim was a public employee who was engaged in the performance of his duty at the time, and (2) that the defendant knew that the victim was such an employee who was engaged in the performance of his duty at that time. *Commonwealth v. Moore*, 36 Mass. App. Ct. 455, 461 (1994). Assault and battery on a public employee may be done recklessly as well as intentionally, and intent to strike the public employee is not required under the recklessness analysis. *Commonwealth v. Correia*, 50 Mass. App. Ct. 455, 457-58 (2000). However, the court added, “There is no explicit scienter requirement for the[] elements [of reckless assault and battery] in the statute. Assuming, without deciding, the existence of such a requirement, compare *Commonwealth v. Francis*, 24 Mass. App. Ct. 576, 577-578 & n.2 (1987); *Commonwealth v. Lawson*, 46 Mass. App. Ct. 627, 629-630 (1999), there is ample evidence here supporting the inference of the requisite knowledge on the part of the defendant.” *Id.* at 459 n.6; see also *Commonwealth v. McCrohan*, 34 Mass. App. Ct. 277, 282 (1993) (jury could properly find that police officer was “engaged in the performance of his duty” while responding in a neighboring town pursuant to a mutual aid agreement under G.L. c. 40, § 8G); *Commonwealth v. Francis*, 24 Mass. App. Ct. 576, 577, 581 (1987) (similar statute, G.L. c. 127, § 38B, requires specific intent to strike a person known to be a correctional officer); *Commonwealth v. Rosario*, 13 Mass. App. Ct. 920, 920 (1982) (defendant who inadvertently struck police officer while intending to strike someone else may be convicted only of lesser included offense of assault and battery); see *Commonwealth v. Sawyer*, 142 Mass. 530, 533 (1886); *Commonwealth v. Kirby*, 56 Mass. (2 Cush.) 577, 579 (1849).

4. **Related offenses.** General Laws c. 127, § 38B sets forth the separate offense of assault or assault and battery on a correctional officer, which is within the final jurisdiction of the District Court. St. 2010, c. 74. General Laws c. 265, § 13F sets forth the separate offense of assault and battery on a person with an intellectual disability; a first offense is within the final jurisdiction of the District Court, though a subsequent offense is not. General Laws c. 265, § 13I sets forth the separate offense of assault or assault and battery on an emergency medical technician or an ambulance operator or ambulance attendant, while treating or transporting a person in the line of duty, which is within the final jurisdiction of the District Court. Among the offenses in G.L. c. 265, § 13J are: (1) assault and battery on a child under 14 causing bodily injury (which is within the final jurisdiction of the District Court) and (2) assault and battery on a child under 14 causing substantial bodily injury (which is not). There are separate aggravated forms of assault and battery if the victim is 60 years or older or is disabled, and the assault results in bodily injury (G.L. c. 265, § 13K[b]) or serious bodily injury (G.L. c. 265, § 13K[c]); both offenses are within the final jurisdiction of the District Court.

5. **Medical testimony.** In a prosecution for assault and battery, medical testimony about the victim's injuries is admissible to establish that the defendant's assault on the victim was intentional and not accidental. *Commonwealth v. Gill*, 37 Mass. App. Ct. 457, 463-64 (1994).

6. **Transferred intent.** An instruction on transferred intent indicates that the Commonwealth need only prove intent as to one of the intended victims and does not have to prove intent specifically directed at each of the actual victims. *Commonwealth v. Melton*, 436 Mass. 291, 299 n.11 (2002). “It is a familiar rule that one who shoots intending to hit A., and accidentally hits and injures B., is liable for an assault and battery on B.” *Commonwealth v. Hawkins*, 157 Mass. 551, 553 (1893); accord *Commonwealth v. Drumgold*, 423 Mass. 230, 259 (1996); *Commonwealth v. Pitts*, 403 Mass. 665, 668-69 (1989); *Commonwealth v. Puleio*, 394 Mass. 101, 109-10 (1985); *Commonwealth v. Ely*, 388 Mass. 69, 76 n.13 (1983).

7. **Statement of reasons required if imprisonment not imposed.** A jury session judge sentencing for this or one of the other crimes against persons found in G.L. c. 265 who does not impose a sentence of incarceration “shall include in the record of the case specific reasons for not imposing a sentence of imprisonment,” which shall be a public record. G.L. c. 265, § 41.

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