

Could Nevada's 'stand your ground' law spark a Trayvon-like case?

By Karoun Demirjian, Las Vegas Sun

As the country tries to understand how Trayvon Martin – a hoodie-clad 17-year-old armed with nothing more than a cellphone, can of iced tea and bag of Skittles – was shot to death in Florida in February without anyone being charged, every possible culprit is being considered.

There's the shooter, neighborhood watch captain George Zimmerman, who has offered a questionable claim of self-defense, and the conduct of Sanford law enforcement officials who decided not to prosecute.

But some of the sharpest outcry has focused on Florida's "stand your ground" law, which justifies use of deadly force in self-defense, with no obligation to first attempt to retreat.

In Las Vegas, officials and academics are taking a close look at the Martin case, and for good reason: Nevada recently passed a law nearly identical to Florida's, leading many to believe a similar tragedy could play out in the Silver State.

"The circumstances are ripe for a Trayvon situation to happen here," said Sylvia Lazos, a law professor at UNLV's Boyd School of Law. "We have a lot of crime. We have a lot of people with guns. We have a lot of people who are untrained. We have to watch it. ... These combinations can be quite toxic."

Nevada is one of 25 states, according to the Legal Community Against Violence, with a law allowing individuals to use deadly force when they feel threatened with no obligation to

stand down or try to avoid violence once reasonable fear is established.

Nevada's "stand your ground" law was approved by the 2011 Legislature and took effect in October. It allows that as long as a person who feels threatened didn't initiate the altercation and isn't doing anything criminal, that person can stand and use deadly force and it would be considered "justifiable homicide."

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