

# Yuriy Bukhenik: Life and Career of a Massachusetts State Police Sergeant

## Early Life and Military Service

Yuriy (Yuri) Bukhenik was born in Ukraine and immigrated to the United States as a child. In fact, he moved to the U.S. from Ukraine at the age of 9 <sup>1</sup>. Adapting to a new country, Bukhenik learned English in addition to his native language (and possibly other languages); he later remarked during court testimony that “English is like a third language for me,” highlighting his multilingual background <sup>2</sup>. After the September 11, 2001 attacks, Bukhenik served in the United States Marine Corps <sup>1</sup>. This military experience became a formative part of his early adulthood. Years later, as a police investigator, he would invoke the Marines’ ethos – saying “never leave a brother behind” – when discussing his determination to solve the cold-case murder of a fellow Marine <sup>3</sup>. Bukhenik’s time in the Marines and his upbringing as an immigrant instilled in him a strong sense of duty and perseverance that would carry into his law enforcement career.

## Joining the Massachusetts State Police

Following his military service, Bukhenik entered law enforcement. Public records show he was working as a Massachusetts State Police trooper by the mid-2010s <sup>4</sup>. He eventually rose to the rank of Sergeant and became a veteran homicide investigator with the State Police <sup>5</sup>. Bukhenik has been assigned to the State Police Detective Unit (the investigative branch of the MSP often attached to county prosecutors for major crimes), focusing on violent crimes and unexplained deaths. His role as a State Police detective has involved him in both active homicide cases and revisiting unsolved cases.

One notable investigation Bukhenik worked on was the murder of U.S. Marine David Cox, a case that had been cold for decades. In 2019–2020, Sgt. John Fanning and Trooper (then) Yuriy Bukhenik – both former Marines themselves – took a *fresh look* at the 1994 killing of David Cox in Medfield, Massachusetts <sup>3</sup>. They brought modern forensic techniques and their military camaraderie to the case, determined to find answers for a fellow Marine. “It’s one of those things: never leave a brother behind. I feel like David has been left behind for 25 years,” Bukhenik said of their motivation in re-examining the Cox case <sup>3</sup>. This renewed push was covered by local news and demonstrated Bukhenik’s dedication to tough cases and victims’ families.

## Role in the O’Keefe/Read Investigation

Bukhenik’s highest-profile assignment has been his involvement in the investigation into the 2022 death of Boston Police Officer John O’Keefe – a case that led to murder charges against O’Keefe’s girlfriend, Karen Read. Sgt. Yuriy Bukhenik was one of the lead Massachusetts State Police investigators in O’Keefe’s death from the very start <sup>6</sup>. He was the on-duty supervisor on the morning O’Keefe’s body was discovered outside a home in Canton, Massachusetts <sup>7</sup>. In that capacity, Bukhenik oversaw the initial crime scene and evidence collection. For example, he made the decision to seize Karen Read’s SUV and cellphone as

evidence within hours of the incident, even before a warrant was obtained <sup>8</sup>. (This rapid evidence seizure would later be scrutinized in court, but it underscores how quickly Bukhenik and his team mobilized in the early hours of the investigation.)



*Massachusetts State Police Sgt. Yuriy Bukhenik holds up a bag containing a red plastic fragment (part of a broken taillight) as evidence during the Karen Read murder trial <sup>9</sup>.*

In the O’Keefe case (often referred to by the defendant’s name, the Karen Read case), Bukhenik played a hands-on role in gathering and presenting evidence. He and fellow investigators recovered a fragment of a broken taillight near where O’Keefe’s body was found, which prosecutors allege came from Read’s Lexus SUV. Years later, during Read’s trial, Sgt. Bukhenik himself showed jurors the red plastic taillight piece and other key evidence collected from the scene <sup>9</sup>. He also took part in sensitive investigatory tasks: in court he was asked to read aloud a chain of flirtatious text messages between Karen Read and another man (an ATF agent) to provide context for the case <sup>10</sup>. This unusual courtroom moment demonstrated the breadth of Bukhenik’s involvement – from fieldwork and evidence handling to serving as a witness explaining the investigation’s findings and timeline.

Throughout the initial investigation and the first trial, Bukhenik’s testimony revealed some of his early investigative theories and actions. Notably, he acknowledged that on the morning of January 29, 2022, he informed the medical examiner’s office that O’Keefe’s injuries *might* have been caused by something like a blunt object (he even speculated about a cocktail glass) rather than a car accident <sup>11</sup> <sup>12</sup>. This indicates that Bukhenik considered multiple possibilities in the case’s early stages, though ultimately the working theory became that Read’s vehicle struck O’Keefe. As the case progressed, Bukhenik’s role as supervisor meant he reviewed and approved reports, coordinated with local police, and ensured evidence was processed – all actions that would later be scrutinized by defense attorneys in court.

## **Commendations and Public Recognition**

Available public information does not show any high-profile awards or medals given specifically to Sgt. Bukhenik, but his career has earned him a reputation for diligence in difficult cases. His status as a former

U.S. Marine has been noted in the context of his police work, indicating respect for his service background. For instance, when the Boston media highlighted Bukhenik's work on the David Cox cold case, it implicitly recognized the trust placed in him to tackle such a long-unsolved, sensitive investigation <sup>3</sup>. Within the Massachusetts State Police, being assigned to a District Attorney's State Police Detective Unit for homicides is itself a mark of professional standing. Bukhenik's experience has been referenced in the press – one outlet described him as a “*veteran homicide investigator*” for the State Police <sup>5</sup>, signifying his years of service and expertise in major cases.

Bukhenik has also received positive acknowledgement from some colleagues during contentious times. At Karen Read's retrial, for example, Bukhenik testified that despite any missteps, he believed the investigation he oversaw was conducted with “*honor and integrity*” <sup>13</sup>. (He was actually referring to the work of Trooper Michael Proctor, his subordinate, but in doing so Bukhenik was also vouching for the overall integrity of their investigative team.) While this is not an award, it shows Bukhenik's commitment to upholding the image of professional conduct in his work. It should be noted that any formal commendations Bukhenik may have earned (such as routine commendation letters, unit awards, etc.) have not been widely reported in the media.

## Controversies and Disciplinary Actions

Despite his long service, Sgt. Bukhenik's career has not been free of controversy. The very same O'Keefe/Read case that put him in the spotlight also subjected his actions to intense scrutiny by defense attorneys and, eventually, by his own department. A major point of controversy stemmed from inappropriate text messages sent by Trooper Michael Proctor (the lead investigator under Bukhenik's supervision) during the case. These texts – joking or crude remarks about the investigation and those involved – were sent to colleagues, including Sgt. Bukhenik, in early 2022 <sup>14</sup> <sup>15</sup>. Bukhenik did not report or formally reprimand Proctor for these messages at the time. When the texts later became public (they were read aloud in court during the first trial), they raised questions about professionalism. Bukhenik admitted on the witness stand that he had responded to one of Proctor's offensive remarks with a “thumbs-up” emoji acknowledgment <sup>16</sup> <sup>17</sup>.

The Massachusetts State Police launched an internal investigation into the conduct of personnel in the O'Keefe case. As a result, Sgt. Bukhenik himself was disciplined for shortcomings in his supervisory role <sup>5</sup>. According to a State Police disciplinary order, Bukhenik was found to have “*failed to properly supervise and/or counsel a subordinate*” regarding those inappropriate communications during an ongoing investigation <sup>18</sup>. He also received criticism for giving an **inaccurate performance review** that seemingly overlooked or downplayed Trooper Proctor's misconduct <sup>16</sup>. In September 2024, the department penalized Bukhenik by requiring him to forfeit five days of vacation time as a consequence of these failures <sup>18</sup>. While this is a relatively mild punishment in lieu of more severe actions, it is a formal mark on his record. (For context, Trooper Proctor, the source of the texts, was suspended and later **fired** by the State Police amid allegations that he mishandled evidence and other aspects of the case <sup>19</sup>. Proctor's firing came after the first trial, reflecting how seriously the agency took the defense's allegations of investigative misconduct.)

During Karen Read's ongoing retrial in 2025, Bukhenik's earlier actions have been a focal point of the defense's cross-examination. Over multiple days on the stand, he faced sharp questioning about evidence handling, delays in processing certain evidence, and the honesty of his reports <sup>20</sup> <sup>21</sup>. Defense attorney Alan Jackson probed why a piece of crucial evidence (broken taillight fragments linking Read's car to the scene) was not officially logged into evidence for weeks, implying a potential cover-up or neglect. Bukhenik

acknowledged the late paperwork but maintained that the investigation's integrity was intact. He insisted that any personal biases did *"not affect the outcome of the investigation"* <sup>22</sup>. Bukhenik also stood by his colleague's work, testifying that in his opinion Trooper Proctor *"acted with integrity and honor"* despite the mistakes <sup>23</sup>. These assertions, however, were met with skepticism by the defense. The trial judge had to intervene at times, cautioning the defense attorney to keep questions fair, as Bukhenik grew defensive under the barrage. Observers noted that Bukhenik's testimony could be at times evasive or strained under pressure – for example, at one point he challenged the defense's use of the word "theory," saying, "I'm sorry, English is like a third language for me, so if you can bring up the Webster's Dictionary, I can read it out loud" <sup>24</sup>. (The courtroom exchange highlighted both his frustration and his language background.) The intense spotlight on Bukhenik's conduct in this case has undoubtedly been a trying chapter in his career, exposing him to public criticism on talk shows, blogs, and social media, even as he continues to assert that he handled the case properly.

## Current Status and Ongoing Involvement

As of 2025, Yuriy Bukhenik remains a member of the Massachusetts State Police, holding the rank of Sergeant. He continues to serve in the investigative capacity to which he's been assigned, and despite the internal discipline he faced, he has not been demoted or charged with any crime. In fact, Bukhenik has been a key witness for the prosecution in Karen Read's second (retrial) murder trial, which began in late 2024 and is continuing into 2025. He spent several days testifying in May 2025, walking the jury through evidence and being cross-examined about the investigation's handling <sup>20</sup>. His testimony in the retrial concluded after about three days on the stand, where both the prosecution and defense exhaustively examined his role. The outcome of the trial remains pending, and Bukhenik's credibility and work are undoubtedly factors the jury will consider.

Outside of the courtroom, Bukhenik's name has not surfaced in connection with other new cases or public hearings in recent months. It appears his focus (and that of the MSP) is on seeing the Read case through its conclusion. Any further career moves or assignments may hinge on the fallout from this trial. If Karen Read is acquitted or if new investigations are opened (for example, into allegations of a cover-up by others), Bukhenik could potentially be called in future proceedings, either as a witness or subject to inquiry. For now, however, he remains on active duty. The State Police have kept him in his post in the Norfolk County Detective Unit through the retrial, indicating institutional support even after the scrutiny he faced <sup>5</sup>.

In summary, Sgt. Yuriy Bukhenik's life and career reflect a journey from a Ukrainian immigrant youth to a U.S. Marine, and then to a law enforcement officer tackling major crimes. He has been involved in commendable efforts like revisiting a fellow Marine's unsolved murder, and he has also faced controversies in a highly-charged police misconduct debate. His story is one of both dedication and criticism: praised for integrity and service on one hand, and questioned for lapses in judgment on the other. As the Karen Read trial and its surrounding investigations conclude, the full impact on Bukhenik's professional reputation remains to be seen. What is clear is that he has been a central figure in one of Massachusetts' most closely watched murder cases, and his actions – past and present – have become part of the public record. Bukhenik's career thus provides insight into the challenges and expectations placed on a modern police investigator navigating complex, high-stakes cases in the public eye.

## Sources:

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