



National Native American Bar Association

Statement by the National Native American Bar Association in Support of the United States Department of Justice's Investigations into the Shooting of John T. Williams and the Seattle Police Department

The National Native American Bar Association (NNABA) condemns the killing of John T. Williams by a Seattle Police officer in August of 2010. Williams was a talented Ditidaht First Nations carver who for many years endured the significant challenges facing homeless Native people in Seattle. His killing has outraged the Tribal community and raised serious concerns about equal justice and Seattle Police Department accountability. These concerns were validated when the Seattle Police Department Firearms Review Board (Review Board) concluded that Officer Birk's use of deadly force against John T. Williams was "unjustified," and a Review Board spokesperson stated it was one of the "most egregious" failings.

It is of particular concern to NNABA that in spite of the finding of the Review Board, the King County Prosecutor has refused to press charges and hold the Officer accountable for the killing of John T. Williams. As a result of this lack of accountability by the Seattle Police Department, the United States Department of Justice has opened a federal civil rights pattern and practice investigation into the Seattle Police Department and a separate criminal investigation into the shooting.

NNABA strongly supports the investigation by the Justice Department into the killing of John T. Williams by a member of the Seattle Police Department and the civil rights investigation into the pattern and practices of the Seattle Police Department.

Further, NNABA strongly encourages that the City of Seattle take real and substantial steps to immediately address documented problems within its police force regarding misconduct toward Native Americans and other persons of color. Such measures should include a review of Seattle Police Department hiring processes, more aggressive recruitment of Native American and other minority candidates, thoughtful and culturally appropriate training of its personnel with regard to the history and culture of the Seattle Native population, and instituting effective procedures for holding officers accountable who use excessive force in violation of the civil rights laws.

Approved by the NNABA Board of Directors on October 7, 2011, by a vote of 8 for, 0 against, and 1 abstention.