

# **CANOES**

City of Seattle Native American Employees

**Statement of Pamela Masterman Stearns, President  
CANOES (City of Seattle Native American Employees)**

**Before the Seattle City Council  
Committee on Energy, Technology, and Civil Rights**

**Discussion of John T. Williams Shooting**

**September 15, 2010**

Good afternoon Council Members. My name is Pamela Masterman-Stearns. My given name is Tleanse'. I am Tlingit, Eagle/Shark (Wooshekeetaan Clan) and I am the daughter of the late Hazel Hope and Tom Dalton of Hoonah, Alaska.

I am here as the President of CANOES, the City of Seattle Native American Employees, whose mission is to (1) raise cultural awareness by educating the City of Seattle about its Native American culture; (2) promote the hiring and advancement of Native American employees in the City; and (3) promote Native American leadership and participation throughout all City programs and services.

We want to thank you for taking the time today to listen to our recommendations regarding to the fatal shooting of John T. Williams. Our testimony is guided by the City's Race and Social Justice Initiative and we will talk about how the RSJI applies, or should apply, to Seattle Police Department policies using its Best Practices criteria.

1. Assess community conditions and the desired community impact.
2. Expand opportunity and access for individuals.
3. Promote racially inclusive collaboration and civic engagement.
4. Affect systemic change.
5. Educate on racial issues and raises racial consciousness.

I would also like to thank my brothers and sisters who took the time to be here today to speak on this important issue. We are happy that they have joined us in solidarity and in spirit.

As you know, John T. Williams was a Native American man, an artist and gifted carver, whose life ended violently in downtown Seattle after he was shot during a confrontation with a police officer. Williams was carrying a carving piece and his legal carving knife. Williams was also deaf in one ear. The shock of this incident has deeply affected nearly all of Seattle. You don't have to be Native, homeless, or disabled, to feel the impact in

your community. There is a tangible feeling of distrust, anger, and resentment in the City.

What we need now is healing and justice. I want to thank the Committee and Chairman Harrell for beginning that process. I'd also like to thank the Mayor and the City Attorney for attending the candlelight vigil last week, and Chief Diaz for attending the community meetings. These are important first steps.

Yesterday, over 60 employees from across the City, including Native American, African American, Latino, LGBT, Asian Pacific Islander Employees affinity groups, Core Teams and Change Team members, including community members, met to discuss some of the issues using the five RSJI Best Practices.

The discussion was guided by the RSJI's Toolkit for Racial Equity and was facilitated by CANOES and the Office for Civil rights. Our recommendations are grouped under the Best Practices which are as follows.

#### The RSJI Five Best Practices

##### 1. Assessment of Community Conditions & Impact

The first element of the 5 Best Practices is the assessment of community conditions and the desired community impact. By carefully documenting current disparities, we can begin to identify goals, and then choose those policies that reduce racism and decrease racial disparities.

CANOES believes that SPD should reassess disparities that exist between the Native community and other communities that SPD serves. SPD should also increase, and evaluate, its training with respect its relationship with the Native American community. CANOES would be glad to assist SPD identify and employ Native American trainers in cultural competency as we have in the past.

We also believe that SPD must examine why many in the Native community fear the police. We believe that officers ought to study the history of why communities of color are over-policed and under-served. And when viewed through an RSJI filter, SPD should stop treating these incidents like a "mistake" but rather analyze them as a result of a system that historically has targeted communities of color.

CANOES recommends that line commanders and patrol officers be required to complete at least 16 hours of RSJI Core team training annually. Part of a broader training would include classes on the history of racism in this country.

##### 2. Expanding Opportunity & Access for Individuals

The second criteria for evaluating Best Practices involves whether policies increase opportunity and/or access for those who historically have been excluded.

We recommend that SPD make a firm commitment to hiring more police officers who understand and are at home with the Native American community. There is a strong feeling that the Police Department has moved away from its neighborhood approach and that it is time for SPD to re-focus on prevention. Now is the time for the Police Department to create connections between the communities and SPD as an institution.

3. Racially Inclusive Collaboration & Civic Engagement

We believe that SPD should collaborate with communities of color to foster mutual respect among people who fully represent Seattle's racial diversity.

We recommend that SPD increase beat walks and use its demographic Advisory Councils and community groups to address and understand cultural issues.

Some suggested yesterday a return to so-called "home rule" whereby officers would once again be required to live in the City of Seattle. That would encourage a stronger connection with the community and also reduce community fear of the police.

CANOES would also like to invite the Police Department, its leaders and officers, as well as the City Council to attend our Native American Heritage Celebration at City Hall on the Second of November.

CANOES also suggests that the City and SPD do more to honor the Native American community in the City's everyday life. The City can do a better job integrating our culture into its laws, policies, arts, youth programs, and schools. We recommend that City employees be allowed to attend cultural events, and get to know other cultures within the Departments (at least 10 hours per year). **And we recommend that the Mayor once again reinstate the position of Tribal Liaison.** The liaison would serve as a policy advisor to the Mayor and the City and would conduct Native American community outreach, direct implementation of intergovernmental relationships with the local tribes, and develop new Native American policy initiatives.

4. Affect Systemic Change

The goal of policy change is to eliminate discrimination and lessen racial disparities. Using this criteria for evaluating RSJI Best Practices, **we recommend that the Office for Civil Rights, the Mayor, and the Police Chief undertake a formal RSJI Assessment of SPD. A 2 month assessment would include an evaluation of outcomes with a racial filter to determine who is being impacted by SPD policies and if there are disparities in terms of the impact of those policies on vulnerable populations.**

**We also recommend that SPD integrate the RSJI into the hiring and evaluation of police officers. We also recommend that Best Practices be used to promote policies that foster accountability. For instance, we understand that Chairman Harrell has an interest in assessing the use of body mounted cameras on police officers.**

Depending on their implementation, and range of officer discretion, such devices could increase accountability. Another change that could increase accountability would be to encourage bystanders or citizen observers to report, record, or even voice a call to stop unacceptable police behavior.

During our meeting, it was also suggested that the Council take a look at the impact of the City's civility laws which may have the unintended effect of making people on the street "the problem" which in turn fuels attitudes and perceptions of officers.

And CANOES recommends that SPD to encourage their own police officers to form a coalition in support of the RSJI and to join the Citywide Affinity Groups.

## 5. Education

The fifth criteria of the RSJI Best Practices is to educate on racial issues and raise racial consciousness. As we mentioned earlier, SPD should be required to embrace cultural training and history of racism training. CANOES further recommends that SPD be required to work with the Seattle Foundation and other partners on an Unity Project lead by CANOES and Gary Owens. The Project would examine our race relations and build our analysis skills. We would specifically reach out to City Employees participating as community members as well as young people.

We would also encourage SPD to join us as we come together to acknowledge the "loss" in our community. CANOES strongly advocates the creation of messages of healing, hope and unity, and we believe that it is important for SPD to join us in the effort. We also recommend that SPD being an ongoing direct relationship with the Chief Seattle Club and other Native organizations in the City. By doing so, SPD can increase its social and cultural interaction with the Native American community in Seattle. For instance, Officers could attend pow wows and officers could also be encouraged to wear civilian attire. SPD could engage in a question and answer session with the Chief Seattle Club members and vice-versa.

## Conclusion

CANOES strongly believes that the City Council and the Mayor should exercise strong oversight of the Seattle Police Department. We believe that our recommendations will increase police accountability and build a stronger relationship between the Department and the Native American community. Just as importantly, we believe that our recommendations will accelerate the healing process. We are glad to offer our assistance to the City Council and to the Seattle Police Department. We remain committed to serving Seattle's Native American employees and community and bringing about change through justice and equality under law.

Gunalscheesh (Thank you)