



City of Seattle

Mike McGinn, Mayor

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**Seattle Commission for People with Disabilities**

September 13, 2010

John Diaz, Chief of Police  
Seattle Police Department

**RE: Fatal Shooting of John T. Williams, a Person with a Disability**

Dear Chief Diaz:

The Seattle Commission for People with Disabilities is writing to express our concern regarding the fatal shooting of John T. Williams by Officer Ian Birk. We understand that Mr. Williams' failure to respond to verbal requests to stop caused Officer Birk to shoot him, and that Mr. Williams' being deaf in one ear may have been a factor in how he conducted himself shortly before his tragic death.

Regardless of his disability status, it is a tragedy that Mr. Williams' life ended so violently.

Mr. Williams' death has had a great impact on Seattle's community of people with disabilities. We believe that this is not an isolated incident, particularly as it pertains to people with disabilities. Historically, the presence of a disability (including use of a wheelchair, hearing or visual impairment, or other disability factors) has had an impact on people's interactions with Seattle police officers.

As the Department's Firearms Review Board and the Office of Professional Accountability conduct their reviews of the incident, we urge you to provide us with an explanation of Officer Birk's conduct. Additionally, we request access to SPD protocols regarding individuals who do not respond to verbal commands and the protocols for solo patrolling.

As you review this incident and the larger policy questions that it raises, we urge you to emphasize accountability, de-escalation in the use of force, improving relationships with the disability community in Seattle, and transparency. Additionally, we ask that you ensure that officers' training emphasizes how disability status can affect how a person responds when engaged by police.

We intend to monitor the progress of the SPD's investigation. We would like to offer you assistance with meetings between SPD and the people with disabilities community to further deepen the dialogue. We appreciate your leadership office and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,  
Seattle Commissions for Persons with Disabilities

cc: Mayor Mike McGinn  
Councilman Tim Burgess, Chair, Public Safety & Education Committee  
Councilman Bruce Harrell, Chair, Energy, Technology, & Civil Rights Committee  
Peter Holmes, City Attorney  
Darryl Smith, Deputy Mayor of Community  
Julie Nelson, Director, Office for Civil Rights  
Felicia Yearwood, Seattle Office for Civil Rights  
Seattle Office of Professional Accountability Review Board  
The Family of John T. Williams