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Coalition Urges Department of Justice to Reopen Investigation Into Police Killing of Terence Crutcher

Today, the family of Terence Crutcher, joined by national civil and human rights legal organizations, local elected officials, and community activists and leaders, formally requested for the Civil Rights Division of the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) to reopen and evaluate its investigation into former Tulsa police officer Betty Jo Shelby's shooting and killing of Mr. Crutcher.

The announcement was made in a press conference held today by **Tiffany Crutcher**, founder and executive director of the Terence Crutcher Foundation; **Ben Crump**, civil rights attorney and co-counsel; **Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee**; **Damarion Solomon-Simmons**, lead counsel for the Crutcher family; **Puneet Cheema**, manager of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and Educational Fund, Inc.'s (LDF) Justice in Public Safety Project, on behalf of **Sherrilyn Ifill**, LDF's president and director-counsel; and **Nicole Austin-Hillery**, executive director of the US Program at Human Rights Watch

In the days immediately following Terence Crutcher's killing on September 16, 2016, the DOJ opened a civil rights investigation into Shelby's actions. On March 1, 2019, the DOJ announced that it would not file charges against Shelby in connection with the shooting, citing insufficient evidence that she willfully used objectively unreasonable force against Mr. Crutcher with the specific intent to violate his civil rights. Given the Trump administration's pervasive apathy—and sometimes outright hostility—toward well-established civil rights, Mr. Crutcher's family has concerns regarding the integrity and independence of the DOJ's review and the abrupt ending of its investigation.

“We are hopeful that an evaluation of the investigation by the Department will provide the family with comfort that a complete and diligent investigation can and did occur,” the groups said in its formal letter request. “We believe that the evidence in this case demonstrates Shelby's unlawful and objectively unreasonable use of deadly force, and that after a full and thorough investigation, the DOJ will arrive at the appropriate conclusion—that federal charges should be filed.”

The coalition believes that Terence Crutcher's family is owed an unbiased and objective investigation by the DOJ into the actions of Shelby. Further, to prevent the killing of more Black Tulsans, the signatories ask the DOJ to evaluate the Tulsa Police Department for patterns or practices of discriminatory or otherwise unconstitutional policing.

The groups further added: “We ask that all Americans are treated equally by those who are sworn to protect them and that when law enforcement officers violate the law, they be held accountable.”

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Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation’s first civil and human rights law organization. LDF has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights. LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.

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