

March 15, 2011

Chief John Diaz  
Seattle Police Headquarters  
610 Fifth Avenue  
P.O. Box 34986  
Seattle, WA 98124-4986

Dear Chief Diaz:

We are writing to you regarding the tragic killing of John T. Williams, a hard of hearing First Nation artist, by former Seattle Police Officer Ian Birk on August 30, 2010. This killing was needless and is a terrible loss of a life. While we understand that Mr. Birk has resigned, we are disappointed that no criminal action was taken. We urge you and the Seattle Police Department to take measures to avoid a similar situation like this from ever happening again.

We understand that the Seattle Police Department is working to improve relations with various populations that have experienced mistreatment at the hands of police officers. We are pleased to learn of this commitment, however, we have not seen any statements with regards to working with deaf or hard of hearing individuals. When you became Chief of the Seattle Police Department, you expressed a commitment to making the community a safe place. We hope that this commitment includes deaf and hard of hearing individuals in Seattle.

Given what happened to Mr. Williams, we strongly encourage you and the Seattle Police Department to require training for all your officers on how to work with deaf and hard of hearing individuals. Our website has an online guide for police and law enforcement agents working with deaf and hard of hearing individuals. We hope to hear back from you and that you take positive measures to ensure that no other deaf or hard of hearing individual is killed or harmed due to communication failures or not understanding how to work with deaf or hard of hearing individuals.

The National Association of the Deaf, established in 1880, is the nation's premier civil rights organization of, by and for deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the United States of America.

Sincerely,



Andrew Phillips  
Staff Attorney  
National Association of the Deaf