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Navajo Nation Council appalled by the clearance of Winslow police officer Austin Shipley in the shooting death of Loreal Tsinigine

WINDOW ROCK – Members of the Navajo Nation Council are disappointed and appalled by Friday’s announcement by the Maricopa County Attorney’s office that Winslow police officer Austin Shipley will not face criminal charges in the shooting death of 27-year-old Loreal Tsinigine – a member of the Navajo Nation.

“Words cannot express how disappointed we are with the outcome of the investigation conducted by the Maricopa County Attorney’s office and the injustice imposed on the family of Loreal Tsinigine,” said Speaker LoRenzo Bates. “We demand U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch to conduct a federal investigation into the wrong and shameful acts of Officer Shipley.”

Speaker Bates said the alleged crime of shoplifting did not warrant the shooting death of Tsinigine that occurred in Winslow on March 27, and called on Maricopa County Attorney Bill Montgomery to provide details into the investigation and the outcome.

“There is clearly something wrong when an officer who is over six-feet tall and well over 200 pounds uses deadly force on a person who weighed less than 100 pounds.” Speaker Bates added. “Why did officer Shipley feel it was necessary to shoot Loreal repeatedly? That is a question that must be answered and the Navajo Nation will not rest until the federal government investigates.”

The decision was issued by the office of Maricopa County Attorney Bill Montgomery, in a letter dated July 19, 2016 to Winslow Police Department chief of police Stephen Garnett.

The Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission issued a statement saying the commission is invariably concerned that the determination was made that officer Shipley’s actions that resulted in taking another person’s life did not warrant criminal prosecution.

“The Commission strongly believes that in this day in age, when mistreatment of citizens by police officers is a strong issue, the killing of a Navajo person who could not defend herself against five gunshots for an alleged shoplifting does not match the crime allegedly committed,” stated Leonard Gorman, executive director for the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission. “I am shocked and dismayed in the results of Maricopa County’s investigation. I cannot see how a person killed for alleged shoplifting justifies a police officer’s action as appropriate.”

On May 26, members of the Navajo Nation Council unanimously approved a resolution calling for U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch to investigate the Winslow Police Department in response to the shooting death of Loreal Tsinigine, who was originally from the small community of Teesto.

Teesto Chapter president Elmer Clark also expressed his dismay with Friday's announcement.

"I am not surprised by the decision, everything is always uphill for Navajos. I am very disappointed in the decision," stated Clark.

Speaker Bates said the Council would continue to support the family of Loreal Tsinigine and continue to urge U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch to open an investigation.

"Our thoughts and prayers remain with the Tsinigine family and I want them to know that we will do everything we can to ensure that justice prevails," Speaker Bates said.

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