



NAACP Arlington Branch
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Arlington, Virginia – The Arlington Branch of the nation’s oldest and largest civil rights organization demands police reform into investigations of opioid overdose deaths and subsequent treatment of the family members.

[In 2023, 22 people died of opioid overdose in Arlington County.](#) On July 5, 2023 one of those people was Tori Thompson, a Black Arlington community member, who was deeply loved by his family. Arlington County did not notify the family of his passing before moving to declare him unclaimed and cremating him against the family’s religious beliefs. “Tori’s passing has left a void in our hearts, he was a devoted father and beloved member of the family,” said Angela Thompson, his mother. **“He had a birth certificate, a note from his loving mother and his ID in his possession. The police’s failure to make sincere efforts to notify the family and treatment during the investigation is unacceptable.”**

Family members, civil rights leaders, and concerned community members gathered on Tuesday July 2, 2024, to demand greater police accountability and transparency. “If the Arlington County Police Department really wanted to notify the family of Mr. Thompson’s death, they could have simply used the items already located in his backpack. If they wanted to be transparent and compassionate about the circumstances surrounding his death, they could have released his property and related police records at the first request, but they didn’t. Only after multiple requests and a formal complaint, did ACPD later share a redacted police report,” said Amy Stitzel, Chair of the Legal Redress Committee for NAACP Arlington Branch.

The NAACP Arlington Branch is calling on Arlington County Police Department to:

1. Increase ACPD supervision and training surrounding alleged unclaimed deaths,
 - A. Ensure there is a liaison responsible for the supervision of the investigation and follow up of the notification of family members regarding the death of a loved one.
2. Amend ACPD policy to include entering any unclaimed death information into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System [“NamUs” database](#) for a reasonable time prior to a motion to cremate any alleged unclaimed person.
3. Include mandatory trauma-informed and implicit-bias training, proactive communication policies, and stronger, more transparent procedures around notifying family and next of kin after a death.

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Founded in 1909 in response to the ongoing violence against Black people around the country, the NAACP is the largest and most pre-eminent civil rights organization in the nation. Our mission is to achieve equity, political rights, and social inclusion by advancing policies and practices that expand human and civil rights, eliminate discrimination, and accelerate the wellbeing, education, and economic security of Black people and all persons of color.