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ACLU submits GRAMA request for release of video footage of Abdi Mohamed shooting by SLCPD

SALT LAKE CITY, UT — The ACLU of Utah and First Amendment attorney David Reymann of Parr Brown Gee & Loveless today submitted an official request that video footage of the shooting of Abdi Mohamed by the Salt Lake City Police Department (SLCPD) be released to the public under Utah's Government Records Access & Management Act (GRAMA). The GRAMA request was submitted to both the Salt Lake City Police Department and the Salt Lake County District Attorney's Office.

Abdi Mohamed, an 18-year-old community member, was shot multiple times by an SLCPD officer on February 27, 2016, in the downtown Rio Grande neighborhood.

The incident, which left Abdi in a coma for several weeks, was recorded by the officer's body-mounted camera. After more than two months, the video footage still has not been released to the public. The name of the officer who shot Abdi also has not been released.

"The public has a right to know what happened in a critical incident like this one," said David Reymann. "Utah's recently-passed body camera legislation makes quite clear that this type of footage should be made public upon request."

The new law, HB300 "Body-Worn Cameras for Law Enforcement Officers," went into effect on May 11, 2016. The law states that footage from such cameras is subject to the same disclosure rules as other public records, and that the government may classify such footage as private only where it is recorded inside a home or residence and does not involve a critical incident like an officer-involved shooting. Since the February 27 shooting, activists and members of the public repeatedly have called for release of the footage of Abdi, which does not fall within any of GRAMA's exceptions.

"Transparency and accountability for all public servants, including and especially the police officers who work in our neighborhoods, are goals we all share as a community," said Leah Farrell, ACLU of Utah staff attorney. "For body cameras to work in service of these goals, agencies must be swift and consistent in releasing footage, especially in high profile situations like this one, where the community demand for information has been very strong."

Concern about shootings of community members by law enforcement has been high in recent years, across the nation and in Utah. Many high-profile cases, such as those of Dillon Taylor in Salt Lake City and Darrien Hunt in Saratoga Springs, have raised awareness of police-involved shootings of young men and women (often racial minorities) who appeared, in retrospect, to have posed little actual threat to public safety or the safety of law enforcement officers.

Multiple grassroots groups, such as the Raise Your Pen Coalition, Utahns for Peaceful Resolution, Utah Against Police Brutality and Cop Watch SLC, sprang up in the aftermath of such incidents, and have been active in pushing for more transparency and accountability regarding law enforcement use of force.

Abdi Mohamed was not the first Utah resident shot by law enforcement officers in 2016. However, his shooting by SLCPD sparked an immediate and vigorous public outcry. Several rallies have been held to demand justice for Abdi and his family, local activists have staged “call-in” campaigns to ask SLCPD to release the body camera footage of Abdi’s shooting, and national media outlets have reported on the incident.

“We all want to live in a country, and in a state, where no community has to fear the police, and where the use of force by law enforcement is a last resort,” said Farrell. “It does not build community trust when such critical public records are withheld from the community.”

Under GRAMA, the Salt Lake City Police Department and the District Attorney’s Office have five days to respond to the request.

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