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State Records Committee Unanimously Rules: All Footage of Abdi Mohamed Shooting Should Be Public

SALT LAKE CITY, UT —The Utah State Records Committee unanimously agreed today with the ACLU of Utah’s arguments that body camera footage, surveillance camera footage and photographs related to the February 2016 shooting of Abdi Mohamed should be classified as public documents and made available to the ACLU of Utah as requested under the Government Records Access & Management Act (GRAMA).

“We thank the members of the Records Committee for their careful consideration of the issues, and appreciate the obvious seriousness with which they weighed the request before them,” said cooperating attorney David Reymann of Parr Brown Gee & Loveless, who argued for the ACLU of Utah before the Records Committee. “Judgment in this case will set important precedent for future arguments in favor of government transparency and public release of police body camera footage under state law.”

As ACLU of Utah attorneys argued before the State Records Committee, members of the grassroots activist group Utah Against Police Brutality demonstrated outside the State Archives building to show their support for full disclosure in the shooting incident.

Abdi Mohamed, an 18-year-old community member who relocated to Utah from Somalia with his family, was shot multiple times by Salt Lake City police officers on February 27, 2016, in the downtown Rio Grande neighborhood. He was in a coma for several weeks and, nearly a year later, is still confined to a wheelchair due to his injuries.

The ACLU of Utah legal team appeared before the Records Committee today to appeal rulings made in October 2016 by the Salt Lake County GRAMA Appeals Board allowing Salt Lake County and Salt Lake City to continue to withhold the requested information from public scrutiny. The ACLU of Utah filed its original GRAMA request in May 2016. In response to the original request, the county released some information about the incident, but excluded footage from police body cameras, as well as several still photographs and surveillance camera footage from the scene of the incident.

“We hope that this ruling results in a full release of footage and photographs regarding the shooting of Mr. Mohamed and makes it easier for community members to gain access to this type of vital public information in the future,” said Leah Farrell, ACLU of Utah staff attorney. “It is very difficult for members of the public to stand against government attorneys and demand the release of public records; the ACLU wants to pave the way for easier access to body camera footage for all community members in the future.”

The State Records Committee has seven days to deliver its order to Salt Lake County and Salt Lake City. The county and city then have thirty days to appeal the Records Committee’s decision in District Court.

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