



# SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL

November 30, 2020

Dear Interim Chief Diaz,

We are writing to urge you to expeditiously compile and release all Seattle Police Department (SPD) records regarding the death of Herbert Hightower Jr., who was fatally shot by Seattle Police in 2004 while experiencing a mental health crisis. These public records were requested in August on behalf of the Hightower family and #JusticeForHerbertHightowerJr movement.

The Hightower family has reported that the SPD responded to their public records request with delay after delay, first promising them by September 21, then October 14, then November 5, and now November 30. It is understandable that old records would require some time to recover from archives, but it is unacceptable to make a family wait months to release records about the death of their loved one.

Seattle City Councilmembers have heard Castill Hightower provide public comment during several City Council meetings describing what she and her family experienced as a near complete lack of public accountability in 2004. She has described changing accounts from Seattle Police, who have provided little clarity on the shooting of her brother. The Hightower family's pain is now being exacerbated as they are made to wait several months and endure three postponements simply to get the public records around the shooting.

The Hightower family is now supported by more than 1,850 community members who have signed a petition demanding Seattle Police release the public records.

We understand SPD has a high volume of requests. Specifically we are aware of the language on your website that says: At this time, the Seattle Police Department's Legal Unit is operating under an extreme backlog of requests, staffing shortages, the redeployment of supporting units to SPD's frontline COVID-19 response, and, pursuant to CDC recommendations and City direction, reassignment to remote access. For these reasons, our ability to process new requests is substantially limited; we are currently estimating minimum response timelines, depending on the volume and complexity of requests, in excess of 6-12 months.

Nevertheless, due to the length of delay that has already occurred and the nature of this request, we urge you to expeditiously compile and release all public records related to the shooting of Herbert Hightower Jr. in 2004.



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Thank you,

Council President M. Lorena González

Councilmember Lisa Herbold

Councilmember Debora Juarez

Councilmember Andrew J. Lewis

Councilmember Tammy J. Morales

Councilmember Teresa Mosqueda

Councilmember Alex Pedersen

Councilmember Kshama Sawant

Councilmember Dan Strauss

cc: Mayor Jenny Durkan  
Andrew Myerberg, Director, Office of Police Accountability  
Lisa Judge, Inspector General  
Community Police Commission