NAACP
Fairfax County Branch

Fairfax NAACP Condemns Governor Youngkin's Commutation of Former Officer Wesley Shifflett's Sentence

FAIRFAX, Va., March 4, 2025 — The Fairfax NAACP strongly condemns Gov. Glenn Youngkin's decision on March 2, 2025 to commute the sentence of former Fairfax County Police Sgt. Wesley Shifflett, who was convicted of reckless discharge of a firearm in the fatal shooting of Timothy McCree Johnson.

On February 28, 2025 a judge sentenced Shifflett to three years of incarceration for reckless discharge of a firearm in the 2023 killing of Johnson, an unarmed Black man who was shot during a foot pursuit following an alleged shoplifting incident. The commutation, granted less than a week later, undermines the legal process and denies the Johnson family the justice they were promised. The community deserved reassurance that such acts would not go unpunished, but instead, this decision devalues the life that was taken and reinforces the deep-rooted issues of unequal accountability in our justice system.

"Governor Youngkin's decision is not just an insult to the Johnson family—it is an affront to every Virginian who believes in equal justice under the law," said Fairfax NAACP President Niki Zimmerman. "Timothy Johnson's life mattered. The community was assured that there would be accountability, and instead, we are witnessing a blatant disregard for that promise. This cannot stand."

Rev. Cozy Bailey, NAACP Virginia State Conference President, stated, "Governor Youngkin's decision to commute the former officer's sentence is a failure of leadership and is a clear signal to the Black community about law enforcement. His decision is a dangerous message to law enforcement officers that they can take the lives of unarmed citizens without facing the full consequences of their actions. Governor Youngkin's decision further reinforces the culture of impunity that we have fought against for years. We will not back down in our fight for justice."

Governor Youngkin and his administration have consistently opposed efforts to strengthen sentencing guidelines for officers who use excessive force, prioritizing political rhetoric over real justice. Leadership at the state level must reflect a commitment to ensuring that law enforcement is held to the highest standard, rather than shielding officers from the repercussions of their actions.

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The Fairfax NAACP has long advocated for stronger foot pursuit policies that emphasize de-escalation and public safety. Law enforcement agencies across the country have adopted policies restricting foot chases unless there is an immediate threat to public safety. The organization urges Fairfax County to continue strengthening its policies to prevent future tragedies.

The Fairfax NAACP remains committed to advocating for stronger foot pursuit restrictions, police accountability, and sentencing reforms. The organization will continue to push for systemic changes to ensure tragedies like the killing of Timothy McCree Johnson do not happen again.