



Seattle Community Police Commission

NEWS RELEASE

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Honoring John T. Williams, Fifteen Years Later

Tomorrow, August 30, marks fifteen years since the tragic shooting that took the life of John T. Williams. John was a First Nations woodcarver, a brother, an artist, and a beloved member of the Seattle community. On that day in 2010, he was crossing a downtown street carrying a block of cedar and his carving tools when he was shot and killed by a Seattle Police Officer. His death was sudden, unnecessary, and devastating, leaving a wound that is still felt deeply by his family, his tribe, and the Seattle community. This tragedy reflects the continued state violence against Indigenous people here in Seattle and across the nation.

The killing of John T. Williams is a painful reminder of what happens when law enforcement fails the people they are sworn to protect. His death became a turning point for Seattle, one of the many tragedies that led to the federal consent decree and the reason the Community Police Commission (CPC) exists today. Our work is rooted in ensuring that John's life and legacy are never forgotten and remain at the heart of why we push for stronger accountability, meaningful reform, and true partnership between community and police.

The CPC carries this work not only as advocates but as community members who lived through these moments. Commissioner Joseph Seia, who knew John personally, reflected:

"I lived right next to where he was killed. I knew him, he was very well known, he was a good human, a good neighbor, and very culturally rooted. We will continue to labor against all violence committed against Indigenous people and ensure that our public safety laws and practice reflect this commitment."

Fifteen years later, we pause to remember John not only for the tragedy of his death but for the richness of his life. His spirit is part of Seattle's story. While progress has been made since his killing, much more remains unfinished. The CPC is committed to honoring John's



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memory by fighting for accountability and by making sure community voices continue to shape how Seattle moves forward.

It is not lost on us that the anniversary comes just days before a federal court hearing on September 3 that marks another turning point in Seattle's police accountability journey. As we look ahead, we do so grounded in John T. Williams' legacy.

This anniversary is not only a moment of reflection, but also a call to action. We honor John by carrying forward the lessons his passing left behind: that public safety cannot exist without trust, that accountability cannot wait, and that every person deserves dignity and a chance at life.

Speaking with the CPC on the eve of the 15th anniversary of John's death, his brother Rick shared words that continue to drive our mission:

"I don't think I would speak down on Seattle Police. I don't hate them; I'm ashamed of them. You didn't give John a chance."

Learn more about the CPC at seattle.gov/community-police-commission.