



STATEMENT ON THE KILLING OF NAKITA WILLIAMS
Coalition for Police Transparency and Accountability
December 2021

Detroit Police killed Nakita Williams on December 19, 2021 as she was suffering a mental health crisis. She is the fourth person in emotional distress to be killed by DPD since May of this year. It is very likely that she will not be the last, as DPD routinely uses deadly force as a first response, especially in cases involving African Americans. That is why we support the recent demands of *Detroit Will Breathe*:

- The immediate release of all body cam footage of the incident and release of all prior complaints against the officers involved;
- The designation of some of the \$828 million in federal money to reopen mental health clinics in the city;
- The redirection of state and local police budgets to mental health clinics.

In addition to demanding full disclosure of police activity in this case, and the immediate direction of resources to much needed mental health provisions, we also call out and condemn the way that racism impacts police practices and promotes the use of deadly force. The fundamental problem in cases like Nakita Williams's is that police officers in the United States regard the lives of African Americans as disposable.

The killing of Daunte Wright, a young African American man in Minnesota, illustrates a veteran police officer's reckless readiness to use deadly force despite many years of training in de-escalation strategies. It appears no amount of training can overcome the deep indoctrination in racism that pervades U.S. culture and characterizes police operations all over this country.

Police officers have demonstrated in countless instances that they know how to apprehend people who are "dangerous," resisting arrest or experiencing trauma, without resorting to deadly force. They apply such skills and knowledge when the unstable offenders are white. One very recent example is the case in Oxford, MI, where Ethan Crumbley, who had shot and killed four fellow students and wounded multiple others, was arrested unharmed.

Yet multiple police officers rushed to shoot and kill Nakita Williams, who was *alleged* to have been waving a gun, which she did not fire. It has since been established that her "gun" was actually an Airsoft that would not have inflicted serious harm to anyone.

There is no assurance of justice for Williams and her family in Police Chief White's promise of an investigation into the killing, given DPD's long-standing pattern of exonerating officers involved in such citizen murders.

How many more people will die before we demand new approaches to public safety? The DPD claims it provides safety and security. The truth is that, like most U.S. police departments, it is a paramilitary force whose primary function is to uphold white supremacist power through intimidation and violence against people of color. In light of this historic role that police carry out consistently, we are called to imagine and create for ourselves new measures and institutions for our protection and safety.

Nakita Williams, like many of us, needed help, but the government has failed in its obligation to provide essential services for people's mental and physical health. Consequently, many citizens call the police as a last resort -- and too often these calls end in tragedy.

Public safety means creating communities where we are able to care for each other, find ways to humanely deal with differences, deescalate conflict, and support one another in times of greatest need. The death of Nakita Williams is a cry for such deep, structural changes that we are called to envision and implement.

#