

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

NATASHA McKENNA: PROTESTING TWO YEARS WITHOUT JUSTICE

Fairfax, Virginia – February 15, 2017 – Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) Northern Virginia will be at the intersection of Fairfax Boulevard/Main Street and Lee Highway on Wednesday, February 15, from 7:00-9:00am, to protest two years without justice since Natasha McKenna was brutally tortured to death by sheriff's deputies and six months without justice since one of those deputies killed Amaya Gomez (a.k.a. Giovanni Martinez) outside Inova Fairfax Hospital.

Both Natasha McKenna and Amaya Gomez were people of color with mental illness whose requests for police assistance led to their being killed by sheriff's deputies in Fairfax County.

Natasha McKenna was jailed for a week without mental health treatment before six FCSO deputies wearing hazmat suits and filtration masks extracted her from the cell naked, pinned her to the ground under a riot shield, strapped her to a restraint chair with a mesh bag over her face, and tasered her four times. She never regained consciousness and died in the hospital on February 8, 2015. Natasha McKenna's last words were, "You promised you wouldn't kill me."

On August 15, 2016, Amaya Gomez (identifying himself as Giovanni Martinez) approached a police cruiser in Annandale seeking help, saying that he wanted to die. He was taken by ambulance to Inova Fairfax Hospital for evaluation. Gomez, who had been exhibiting signs of mental illness in recent months, was later discharged from the hospital and escorted to a bus stop. When Deputy Patrick McPartlin responded to a call about a person at the bus stop wielding "a weapon," Gomez reportedly swung a small signpost at McPartlin. Video revealed that within just seconds of arriving on the scene, McPartlin opened fire on Gomez several times. He died shortly thereafter.

Deputy Patrick McPartlin is one of the six Fairfax County deputies who caused the death of Natasha McKenna in the Adult Detention Center in 2015.

At a community forum on March 5, Sheriff Stacey Kincaid had admitted the community wouldn't find closure until the men who killed Natasha McKenna were fired. She said that her department was still reviewing the case, but that the deputies were no longer working with the mentally ill population. Black Lives Matter organizer April Goggans challenged Kincaid, saying that if another person was killed while Kincaid was reading and reviewing documents, blood would be on her hands.

For nearly a year and a half since Commonwealth Attorney Ray Morrogh declined to prosecute the six deputies who tortured Natasha McKenna to death, Black Lives Matter DC, BYP 100 DC, SURJ Northern Virginia, and other organizations and individuals have been demanding that they be fired.

In July, 2016, when SURJ delivered for the second time a petition calling for Sheriff Kincaid to fire the six deputies, Cayce Utley, a lead organizer with SURJ Northern Virginia, said "We are tired of waiting for Kincaid to determine whether black lives matter. If Natasha McKenna's life doesn't matter enough to the sheriff to hold these men accountable, she needs to resign."

After McPartlin killed Gomez in August, it was revealed that, contrary to Kincaid's claims in March, he was stationed at the Merrifield diversion center.

Neither the county's "Diversion First" program nor the changes proposed by the Fairfax County Ad Hoc Police Practices Review Commission would have prevented what happened to McKenna or Gomez.

Fairfax County maintains, on the basis of a survey released in April, 2016, that county residents are generally satisfied with local policing. The survey significantly underrepresented Black people, Asian people, Latinx people, immigrants, people without college degrees, and young people living in Fairfax County.

SURJ Northern Virginia is a chapter of Showing Up for Racial Justice, a national network of groups and individuals organizing white people for racial justice. Through community organizing, mobilizing, and education, SURJ moves white people to act as part of a multi-racial majority for justice with passion and accountability. SURJ works to connect people across the country while supporting and collaborating with local and national racial justice organizing efforts. SURJ provides a space to build relationships, skills and political analysis to act for change.

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