

Nation files complaint over Winslow shooting

Written by Staff Reports
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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation filed a complaint against the City of Winslow and the federal government March 27 alleging civil rights violations in connection with the shooting death of Loreal Tsingine by Winslow police on March 27, 2016. Tsingine was shot five times at close range by Officer Austin Shipley. Tsingine was 5 feet tall and weighed 105 pounds; Officer Austin Shipley was 5 feet 11 inches tall and weighed 200 pounds.

In its complaint, the Nation alleges that these actions by the Winslow police against Tsingine violated her civil right to be free from unreasonable search and seizure under the Fourth Amendment. The complaint also alleges that the failure of the federal government, specifically the U.S. Department of Justice, to take action against the City of Winslow, violates the rights of Tsingine and members of the Navajo Nation to equal protection under the law as guaranteed by the Fifth Amendment.

“This type of treatment of our people in border towns will no longer be tolerated,” stated Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye. “Our people have the right to be free from unreasonable violence when they visit our neighboring communities — particularly from off-reservation law enforcement. Navajo lives matter, and that needs to be acknowledged and protected by our bordering jurisdictions.”

While the City of Winslow is located off the Navajo Reservation, Native Americans (predominantly Navajo members) make up 25 percent of the Winslow population. Many suspect this number is not reflective of the true presence of Navajo people in Winslow as a number of Navajo residents commute from the reservation to Winslow for work and school. Indeed, it is estimated that Navajos spend 75 percent of every dollar generated on the Nation in border towns such as Winslow.

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“The Navajo people fuel the economy of the City of Winslow. We have just as much right as anyone else to be free from police violence when we visit there to shop, work, and attend school” said Attorney General Ethel Branch, who herself attended elementary and middle school in Winslow while her parents lived nearby on the Navajo Reservation. “Native Americans experience death by police at a higher rate than any other group,” Branch said. “Although we make up only 25 percent of Winslow’s population, we averaged nearly 64 percent of Winslow police department arrests from 2012 to 2015. There is clearly a problem in how Winslow treats its Native population; we hope this lawsuit will inspire the city to pursue meaningful changes in their law enforcement policies and procedures to ensure that Native lives are valued and protected.”

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