

BLACK LIVES MATTER

MORRISTOWN

Attorney General Gurbir Grewal
Richard J. Hughes Justice Complex
25 Market Street, P.O. Box 112
Trenton, NJ 08625

Monday, July 20, 2020

RE: Justice For Amanuel Tamirat “Amani” Kildea

Dear Attorney General Gurbir Grewal:

We, the undersigned New Jersey residents and organizations, demand that the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General conduct a thorough, prompt, appropriate and professional investigation into the suspicious death of a Black man, named Amani Kildea, whose body was found hanging at Lewis Morris Park in Morristown, NJ on Sunday, June 28, 2020.

Less than 72 hours after discovering Amani’s body, Morris County Prosecutor Fredric M. Knapp released a written statement saying that the Morris County Medical Examiner’s Office determined Amani’s death to be a suicide and that “there is no cause to believe there is any criminality involved.” On July 3, 2020, the Morris County Prosecutor’s Office released a second press release regarding Amani only to lend little to no extra information. Not only is it odd for the Morris County Prosecutor’s Office to feel the need to release a second, “more clarifying” release, but the updated statement failed to provide the Black community with any reassurance into a more thoughtful investigation at all.

Amani Kildea was a 20-year old Black man and resident of Washington Township. He was adopted in 2005 from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. From the age of 5, he resided in Washington Township. Amani had a promising future ahead of him and had plans to attend James Madison University this fall and to pursue a career in federal law enforcement. Despite being only 20-years-old, he did not wait to pursue his dream of serving the community and began setting up sting operations to find and expose pedophiles in New Jersey with his friends, akin to the show “To Catch A Predator.” Please see Instagram profile @PedoGotCaught. Through this work,

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Amani and his four friends have exposed at least 30 pedophiles in the North Jersey areas. This work has led to multiple arrests, including that of the Mayor of Netcong's son and an active duty police officer, which may demonstrate significant evidence of individuals with motive to harm Amani. Amani's work in the community to expose sexual predators was brave, but dangerous, leaving him vulnerable to retaliation from those criminals. Despite Prosecutor Knapp's assertion that there is "no cause for criminality involved" in his death by hanging, Amani's work in the community sheds light on a possible motive to kill and silence him. It is believed that the Morris County Prosecutor did not know about the pedophile sting operations at all and, therefore, that all the 30+ suspects that were previously exposed on Instagram and YouTube were not all vetted. Amani had an extensive social history, seemed to be excited about life, ready to take life by the horns and fight crime. Amani's life being cut short just does not make sense.

A change.org petition called "Justice for Amani Kildea" has garnered support from more than 309,000 concerned citizens who are demanding a thorough investigation. Amani's case has received national news coverage and has caused real fear in the community. Morristown, NJ is a close-knit, small town, bedroom community about an hour west of NYC where some families have been living for generations. Additionally, in 2017 the Morristown council unanimously approved a "Fair and Welcoming Community" resolution that celebrates the town's diversity. Morristown residents could never imagine a situation like Amani's happening here whether it be by suicide or by homicide. It has been at least two weeks since Amani's death and we are in the dark and scared.

Despite Prosecutor Knapp's statements, Amani's suspicious death raises public safety concerns as Amani is one of seven Black people found dead by hanging in the United States in the last month alone. As of late, Black men and women have been found lynched all across the United States of America, in public places, and all of these deaths have swiftly been ruled a suicide without corroborating evidence. It is obvious that there is, and continues to be, a rush to judgment without thoroughly investigating all of the facts when it pertains to the death of Black people. The same remains true here as it is not possible for the Morris County Prosecutor's Office or any other public agency to thoroughly or appropriately investigate all of the facts

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(known and unknown) surrounding the death of Amani Kildea within 72 hours of his suspicious hanging.

Amani Kildea's death by hanging did not occur within the privacy of his home. Amani Kildea's death by hanging occurred in a public park, almost an hour away from his residence. As such, with Amani's connection to Morristown and Lewis Morris Park unclear as he was miles away from home, this case raises public safety concerns and is of public interest. All unattended deaths should be investigated as a homicide until compelling evidence proves otherwise. The public needs to be assured that all physical evidence align with the finding that Amani died by suicide and not by any other unnatural manner. It is very rare that suicides are found in public. The community has a right to know "how" Amani died. It appears that there was a rush to deem this hanging a suicide rather than to conduct a thorough investigation as to the possible lynching of a Black man in Morristown in 2020 - yet another in a series of unexplained hangings that have occurred in recent weeks.

The residents of the Greater Morristown Area have concerns regarding the Morris County Prosecutor's Office's efforts in this case, diligence and overall competency for a number of reasons. The Morris County Prosecutor's Office is an office that is notorious for not answering to and not reaching out to the Black community of the Greater Morristown Area. Additionally, there are active lawsuits against the Morris County Prosecutor's Office that raise concerns for the equity of Black people when it comes to fair investigations and fair policing. Moreover, when Prosecutor Knapp came into office he terminated efforts for community policing. In consideration of all the aforementioned, and the current social climate in America, the community is alarmed and has little faith in a fair investigation into Amani's death.

In 2008, a 26-year-old Hispanic woman named Eliana Torres was found deceased in a bathtub full of water at her home in Morristown, NJ. Initially, the Morris County Medical Examiner's Office reported her death to be a suicide and the prosecution agreed. It wasn't until four years later that a more thorough investigation revealed that she was actually killed by her

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husband, Kleber Cordova, in front of their 8-year-old daughter. He was convicted of murder, endangering the welfare of a child, tampering with evidence and hindering apprehension in 2012. We do not want it to take years for the truth of what happened Amani to surface due to a lackadaisical investigation and community concerns being treated with indifference.

The historical seasons have changed, and once again, America's trees are bearing strange and bitter fruit - dead Black bodies. In our country's racist history, when a Black person was hung in public, it was to send a message. The racist history of this country, and in Morristown, cannot be ignored when investigating and addressing Amani's death. These incidents are happening at a time of nationwide racial upheaval - when people are already on edge and suspicious about police accounts of their encounters with Black people. Tree hangings evoke traumatic memories of America's grisly history of unpunished lynchings of thousands of Black adults and children. It is quite difficult for many Black folks to believe that Black people are hanging themselves by the neck, in public, from trees, while the fire of racial politics continues to blaze.

We are in a moment with parallels to the era of lynching that should cause us great suspicion of any rush to label the cases as a suicide. During the lynching era, it was not uncommon for the deaths of Black men to be ruled as suicides to cover up murders by white mobs and police officers. The trend of declaring Black lynchings to be suicides stretches back to the 1930s. One of the first ways that lynchers and police who murdered blacks got exonerated was through the coroner. These swift rulings would be a way for police officers to escape their obligation to investigate and do their job, to cover up for police officers they knew or community members they wanted to protect from prosecution.

On March 19, 1941, 19-year-old Felix Hall went missing from his barracks at Fort Benning, Georgia. His body was found hanging over a ravine in the woods on the military base. His hands and legs were tied behind his back with a wire and military officials said that his death was a suicide even though a military doctor who examined Hall's body within two weeks of when he was found said it was a homicide and put that on the death certificate. In another case, Ab

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Young, a farm laborer from Slayden, Mississippi was killed on March 12, 1935 after being accused of killing a state highway worker. He fled to Tennessee and was captured by a mob that dragged him back to Mississippi, where he was hung in a schoolyard, his body peppered with bullets. Though his lynching was advertised in advance, a reporter and photographer showed up to document the event and nearly 50 people were involved, a coroner's jury ruled that Young's death was a suicide. This, among many other reasons, is why the current death of Amani is unsettling - even though police and prosecutors say they're not suspicious of criminality.

We believe this case has been a miscall. We also fear that there is and will be a halfhearted, careless investigation with no transparency. While we understand that divulging too much information too early may taint an investigation, the community demands answers to the following questions:

1. How did Amani get to Lewis Morris County Park? Did he have a car? If so, where was his car parked or found? If not, did someone drive Amani? Did he Uber? If so, at what time did his ride leave him at the park?
2. Who was the last person to speak to Amani in person or through electronic medium? Did anyone know Amani's plans for Sunday, June 28, 2020?
3. Was Amani in the process of outing yet another pedophile before he died/was killed?
4. Were all 30+ of the previously exposed pedophiles questioned and were their alibis vetted before ruling Amani's death a suicide?
5. What was Amani's connection to the Greater Morristown Area, if any? What was Amani's connection to Lewis Morris Park, if any? Why was Amani going to Lewis Morris Park, if known?
6. What was Amani hanging from? What was Amani hanging on? How was the object tied that was used to hang Amani? How high was Amani hanging off the ground? If Amani died by suicide, did he climb the tree and then jump? If so, are his internal and external injuries consistent with this finding? If Amani died by suicide did he have a device such as a stool or ladder that allowed him to climb that he possibly kicked out of the way to die by hanging? If so, where is the physical evidence to support this? Were there any foot prints or other physical evidence pointing to additional individuals where Amani was found?

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7. Amani was allegedly found in the Sugarloaf Picnic Area of Lewis Morris Park. Was Amani found “off the beaten path” or was he found in a more open area? Can the public have a picture of the actual tree or area that Amani was found?
8. Does Amani have a history of mental health?
9. What was Amani’s life at home like? What was Amani’s social life like?
10. Was Amani’s cell phone pinged on his date of death and the day prior? If so, for how long was Amani’s cell phone pinged prior to him being found at the location of his death? Prior to coming to Lewis Morris Park, where did Amani go? Were Amani’s cell phone records examined?
11. Can the Medical Examiner’s report be disclosed to the public? If so, how soon? Can there be a second medical examination performed on Amani’s body to confirm the results of the first examination?
12. Are Amani’s physical and internal injuries consistent with a suicide by hanging? Are there any peculiar injuries internally or externally?
13. How long was Amani deceased when he was found?
14. What was the nature of patrol at the Lewis Morris County Park on Sunday, June 28, 2020? Who found Amani?

It is possible that Amani’s death was caused by suicide, however, our community has zero faith in the Morris County Prosecutor’s Office to properly handle this case with carefulness, truth and to treat the Black community with empathy during this time. Amani’s death did not just affect his close family and friends, his untimely death has deeply impacted the Black community.

It is for all of the reasons aforesaid that the undersigned demands that the Attorney General takeover the investigation of the death of Amani Kildea and that the community be provided with answers.

Respectfully,

Black Lives Matter Morristown