



March 3, 2023

Dear Delegate Bartlett,

My name is Sherri Warren, and I represent The Keith Warren Justice Foundation. I am writing in support of HB 863, and the importance of how extending the grace period to six months will be extremely beneficial to families suffering through the same tragedy of the unknown as mine.

In 1986, my brother a nineteen year old black man named Keith Warren was found strung up on a tree in Montgomery County, Maryland. His death was ruled a suicide. Pictures from the death scene say otherwise. The first responder believed otherwise. At the time of his death, my mother Mary Couey was not given an exact time, date, or cause of death. There was no autopsy. Police (a Detective Beasley), released his body directly to a funeral home of Detective Beasley choice. From 1986-1999 it was explained to my mother by the then Chief of Police Bernard Crooke, Chief Donald Brooks, Chief Edwards and also echoed by Chief Manger and Cheif Jones in 2014, 2016, and 2018 that in 1986 the police had the authority to send bodies to the funeral homes of their choice prior to notification of the next of kin and ordering no autopsy. In 2018, I requested under the MPIA /FOIA proof of this procedure and the policy manual from the Montgomery County Police Dept. and was told that there is no existing copy, electronic or hard available to confirm that this was true. In addition, my mother was informed of my brother 's death six hours after he was found and his body released to a funeral home . Again, no autopsy was ordered, and there was no investigation once the body was released from the scene.

Subsequently, over the next six months after my brother's body was found questionable actions continued to be taken by the police department. It was confirmed that the coroner never came to the scene, and there are conflicting dates on the death certificate, police report and the medical examiner's report. Detective Beasley (lead at the death scene) cut the tree down one month after we buried Keith claiming he was collecting evidence. However, if the case was closed the day Keith's body was found, why was he collecting evidence one month after we buried him? In 1986, there was nothing medical, scientific or factual to back up the claim from the police department, or the medical examiner that my brother's death was a suicide. For twenty-three years my mom fought for justice and accountability to find out what happened to my brother and how he ended up hanging from a tree. Tragically she died in 2009, with these and other unanswered questions remaining about the handling of death of my brother Keith Warren, in the midst of racial tension around our country, and the FBI, themselves issuing a bulletin warning of the infiltration of white nationalist into police departments across the country. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/white-supremacist-links-law-enforcement-are-urgent-concern>

Thirty-seven years later I am continuing my mom's fight for some sense of justice in Keith Warrens death as well as to bring a voice to her struggle and to others who struggle to understand the unintended roadblocks that deter their access to truth. In hindsight, it's possibly that if my mother had the extended grace period to challenge the ruling on Keith's death certificate in 1986, she would not have suffered the remaining twenty-three years of her life looking for answers as to how her only son ended up hanging from a tree. Families in the midst of grief, suspecting the mishandling of a loved ones death, cannot reasonably be expected to be able to know and prove their allegation in 60 days. Please pass HB 863.

Respectfully,

Sherri Warren

Sherri Warren

www.TheKeithWarrenJusticesite.com