

THE RACIAL JUSTICE NETWORK

*3900 Leeds Avenue, Suite 102
North Charleston, South Carolina 29405
July 12, 2021*

Elder James Johnson, President



South Carolina Supreme Court
1231 Gervais Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

RE: JAMAL SUTHERLAND'S CASE

TO: The Honorable Chief Justice Donald W. Beatty:

We wish to address an important matter regarding the judicial system in Charleston, South Carolina. The judicial process over the past several years has been very disconcerting and raises the question as to equal justice under the law. The pattern of recent events leads us to believe that justice is being denied in the case of Jamal Sutherland.

Jamal Sutherland, a 31-year-old mentally ill young man, was killed while being escorted/forced from his cell at the Charleston County Jail for a bond hearing. During a news conference on June 16, 2021, it was announced by Charleston County Coroner Bobbi Jo O'Neal that she re-categorized Sutherland's manner of death from undetermined to homicide. Homicide is taking the life of a person by another. The Coroner said Sutherland died of a cardiac event when he was removed forcibly from his cell by deputies on January 5. The Coroner further stated three factors led to his death: his excited state, change in his medication while at Palmetto Behavioral Health Center and "subdual force" exercised by deputies to remove Sutherland from his jail cell. The deputies used tear gas, Taser shocks and physical force.

Solicitor Wilson announced that she would reach a decision by the end of June 2021 whether to criminally charge detention deputies Brian Houle and Lindsay Pickett for their role in the egregious death of a 31-year-old mentally ill, Jamal Sutherland. The family and public are still awaiting her decision and feel strongly that a new prosecutor needs to be appointed to move the case forward.

All too often, legal analysis and the alleged crime are tainted by improper or misleading documentation of medical conditions. Physical evidence may have been collected improperly. During one of Solicitor Wilson's press conference, she said the Sutherland family did not want the community to see the video. Solicitor Wilson's allegation was misrepresented to local media and the Sutherland family. This type of opinionated action by the Solicitor has eroded public trust in due process. Equally noteworthy was Solicitor Wilson's comment in the highly publicized case of Walter Scott when she said Scott caused his death when he was shot in the back by a North Charleston Police Officer.

On or about the 5th of January 2021, two Charleston Deputies, Brian Houle and Lindsay Pickett did commit an act of violence that resulted in the death of 31-year-old mentally ill Jamal Sutherland in the Charleston County Detention Center.

As late as June 29, 2021, Ninth Circuit Prosecutor, Scarlett Wilson stated her office was still investigating Sutherland's case. The term homicide means murder or manslaughter which is a punishable offense. Amidst public protests, the Charleston County Sheriff's Office terminated the two deputies.

It is our opinion that Sutherland was not abusing drugs from the Palmetto Behavioral Health Center as was reported. Family members have been patient and exercised dignity during this very horrendous ordeal and in taking care of a mentally ill family member.

In support of the family, community, civic organizations and the greater Charleston area, we respectfully request that you appoint a new Solicitor to take over the Sutherland's case. Solicitor Wilson has repeatedly stalled on high profile cases over the years including the case of nine (9) members of Mother Emanuel A.M.E. Church murdered in Charleston, South Carolina.

The Honorable Chief Justice Ernest Finney was appointed in May 1994. In 1995 a new Prosecutor was appointed in the high profiled trial of Susan Smith. The new Prosecutor SC Rep. Tommy Pope, who gained fame prosecuting the Susan Smith case two decades ago, created and maintained transparency and accountability of the judicial process for over twenty years in South Carolina.

In the Judicial System, honorable men and women who are sworn to protect and serve without bias are highly applauded for their service and their legacy will be noted in the annals of history.

Thanking you in advance for your assistance in this matter. Feel free to contact our office or any of our coordinators for justice.

Sincerely,

S/Elder James Johnson

Elder James Johnson, President
Phone: 843-532-0787