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- Neighborhood Improvement Development Corporation Board
- Library Board
- Commission on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault



MILELE A. COGGS
6th District Alderwoman

Results of Williams probe expose deeper problems

Statement of Alderwoman Milele A. Coggs May 28, 2013

The federal investigation into the death in police custody of Derek Williams was perhaps the last best hope for Milwaukeeans who had hoped to see someone held responsible for that tragic, unnecessary loss. With the announcement today by federal prosecutors that charges will not be sought against the three Milwaukee police officers involved, many other community members and I are, of course, very deeply disappointed.

The decision not to seek charges by both federal and local officials will not only further polarize the relations between the Milwaukee Police Department and the community, I feel it shines a light on just how significantly those relations have deteriorated.

I realize that prosecutors from the U.S. Attorney's office are constrained by the bounds of the law to prove that officers willfully and unreasonably failed to respond to Derek Williams' cries for help in the back of that squad car. As a lawyer, I realize what a significant burden of proof that entails. But I do not think anyone who watches the video from that squad car will tell you that officers' response to Derek's distress was adequate, and it certainly was not compassionate. The U.S. Attorney's office and I will have to agree to disagree about whether it was willful.

"Willful" by legal standards or not, that demonstrable lack of compassion drives at the heart of the community-police relations problem in this city, and the racial undertones thereof. It leaves many community members, local leaders and me asking an uncomfortable question—if it had been a young man of a different socio-economic status in the back of that squad car begging for help and gasping for breath, would he have received medical attention?

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