



STATE OF WASHINGTON
COMMISSION ON HISPANIC AFFAIRS
COMISIÓN DE ASUNTOS HISPANOS

Death of Latino Shows Deepening Systemic Issues

August 8, 2016

Olympia, WA –On July 31, 2016 two officers were involved in the shooting of Mario Martinez Torres in Wapato, Washington a city whose population is 84.2% Latino. There is a growing sentiment within the Latino community that there is a lack of accountability for police officers, especially when the decision is made to use lethal force. The Commission on Hispanic Affairs (CHA) is gravely concerned and shares the community’s sentiment that the lack of accountability of police officer-involved shootings in recent memory may be indicative of broader systemic issues and potential systemic violations of 4th Amendment of civil rights and excessive use of force.

Mr. Martinez Torres is the seventh fatal officer-involved shooting in Yakima County, all of which were found to be justified:

- July 31, 2016 – Mario Martinez Torres
- June 10, 2016 – J. Juan Briseno-Ortega
- November 5, 2015 – Anthony La Violette
- July 11, 2014 – Ira Arquette
- April 12, 2014 – Rolando Villanueva
- January 4, 2014 – Rocendo Arias
- January 3, 2014 – Jesse Humphrey

Accountability for law enforcement officers, especially when the decision is made to use lethal force, is paramount to maintaining law enforcement-community relations. The Commission’s position is that respect, high regard and support for law enforcement and holding law enforcement officers accountable to the expected standards of conduct that value life are not mutually exclusive.

This case draws stark parallels with the recent case of Antonio Zambrano Montes’ shooting death in Pasco, Washington. Members of his community showed shock and disbelief that Mr. Martinez Torres would do anything to justify his shooting. The death of Mr. Martinez Torres is indicative of the community’s perception that a culture of violence towards men of color in law enforcement offices in the Yakima Valley and Tri-Cities area persists.

The Commission has requested that the United States Department of Justice conduct an independent investigation of this shooting to address the community’s concerns.

The Commission sends it deepest condolences to the Martinez Torres family during this tragic time and will continue to advocate for increased accountability for law enforcement officers throughout the state.

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