



WASHINGTON BUREAU · NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE
1156 15TH STREET, NW SUITE 915 · WASHINGTON, DC 20005 · P (202) 463-2940 · F (202) 463-2953
E-MAIL: WASHINGTONBUREAU@NAACPNET.ORG · WEB ADDRESS WWW.NAACP.ORG

ISSUE UPDATE



TO: Concerned Pe
FROM: Hilary O. Shel

NAACP-SUPPO..... JDY REPORING ACT PASSES THE U.S. SENATE!!!

*NEW LAW WILL REQUIRE ALL LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES TO SUBMIT
UNIFORM REPORTS OF DEATHS OCCURING WHILE IN THEIR CUSTODY*

THE ISSUE

Late last night, on Wednesday, December 10, 2014, the United States Senate passed, with strong bipartisan unanimous support, NAACP-supported H.R. 1447, the *Death in Custody Reporting Act*. This important bill passed through the U.S. House of Representative in December of 2013 on a bi-partisan voice vote.

The legislation, which now must be signed into law by President Obama, is strongly supported by the axiom, "in order to manage a problem, you must first be able to measure it." It will require states to report to the U.S. Department of Justice information on every instance in which a person dies while in the custody of a law enforcement official, including: (1) the name, gender, race, ethnicity, and age of the deceased; (2) the date, time, and location of death; (3) the law enforcement agency that detained, arrested, or was in the process of arresting the deceased; and (4) a brief description of the circumstances surrounding the death. Having this information in one central location will enable us to study trends and compare the records of jurisdictions, so that we may begin to see where there is and is not a problem. It will go a long way to not only understanding the phenomenon of the deaths of Americans while in custody, but also may also begin to alleviate the environment of suspicion, concern and mistrust that currently exists in many racial and ethnic minority communities across America today by providing much-needed transparency in our Nation's criminal justice system.

Much of the information we are requesting be forwarded to the US Department of Justice is already collected. Every time there is a death while the deceased is under the care of law enforcement, a form must be filled out and sent to the commanding officer or internal affairs. Often these forms end up in personnel files. We are simply asking that a copy be sent to the US Department of Justice and that it contain all the information listed above. This information can then be assimilated, studied and compared by everyone from community groups to experts in criminal justice to law enforcement agencies themselves.

The *Death in Custody Reporting Act* has been sponsored, since 2007, by Congressman Bobby Scott (VA) and was introduced more recently in the U.S. Senate by Senator Richard Blumenthal (CT).

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