

**MAXINE WATERS**

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION,  
BORDER SECURITY AND CLAIMS

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-0535**

May 5, 2010

The Honorable Thomas E. Perez  
Assistant Attorney General  
U.S. Department of Justice  
Civil Rights Division  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Office of the Assistant Attorney General, Main  
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Assistant Attorney General Perez:

As the U.S. Representative for California's 35<sup>th</sup> District, I am deeply concerned about the circumstances surrounding the detention and release of Mitrice Richardson, a constituent who disappeared on September 17, 2009 following her arrest by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LACSD). Serving on the House Committee on the Judiciary, I am equally troubled by reports that question whether the Malibu/Lost Hills Sheriffs Station acted properly in releasing Mitrice Richardson during the predawn hours without money or transportation, all while she was suffering from what the Los Angeles Police Department's (LAPD) doctors have concluded to be bipolar disorder.

Due to delays and distrust in the local authorities' investigation, the family launched an aggressive campaign to raise money and resources to personally investigate Mitrice's disappearance. Constituents from across my district called for a federal investigation and inundated my Los Angeles office with phone calls, letters, and faxes requesting my support in their efforts to find Mitrice. The FBI declined to get involved in the investigation after I sent a letter to Director Mueller, but after months of public outcry and discontent, the LAPD, in cooperation with LACSD, finally decided to devote the resources necessary to investigate Mitrice Richardson's disappearance.

However, despite several official agency searches of the area surrounding the Lost Hills station, no new evidence has been recovered. The family has now filed various legal claims against LA County, alleging that the sheriffs were negligent in their detention and release of Mitrice Richardson. Since the beginning of the case, Mitrice's parents have been highly suspicious of the LACSD, and they believe the sheriffs may have been involved with Mitrice's disappearance.

PLEASE REPLY TO:

WASHINGTON, DC OFFICE  
2344 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
 WASHINGTON, DC 20515-0535  
PHONE: (202) 225-2201  
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Under our federal civil rights statutes, disabled individuals are a protected class, and thus, local authorities are expected to enact policies and procedures that provide for reasonable accommodations for persons detained who suffer from a mental disability. While it is the Malibu/Lost Hills Sheriffs Station's policy to treat mentally disabled individuals differently from other individuals, it appears in Mitrice Richardson's case that the sheriffs failed to follow their own procedures. According to their policy, "individuals deemed to have medical or mental disabilities that would prevent them from adequately caring for themselves are released to the care of a friend, family member, or caretaker. If a caretaker is unavailable, then the individual is released to a qualified medical or mental health facility." The sheriffs contend that they could not have known that Mitrice was mentally disabled. However, on the night of the arrest, several witnesses told the sheriffs that Mitrice may be suffering from a mental disability and needed medication.

I believe that the Department of Justice (DOJ), with its trained and experienced personnel and abundance of resources, is better equipped than a private individual to investigate. In addition, DOJ has the responsibility to pursue cases implicating federal criminal or civil rights statutes. I believe the circumstances and facts of this case warrant the Justice Department's involvement.

Therefore, it is with great urgency that I respectfully request that the DOJ open an investigation into Mitrice's disappearance and the circumstances surrounding her arrest, detention, and release from the custody of the Malibu/Lost Hills Sheriff Station.

Thank you for your consideration of this request; I look forward to hearing from you soon. If you have any further questions about this matter, please contact me or Twaun Samuel of my staff at (202) 225-2201.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maxine Waters". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Maxine Waters  
Member of Congress

CC: Attorney General Eric Holder