



# NAACP

Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20530

July 10, 2026

Dear Acting Attorney General Blanche:

In just one week, two young Black men have been killed while in the custody of, or in the presence of, law enforcement agencies in Tennessee. We write to request that the U.S. Department of Justice immediately open and conduct a full and fair investigation into the tragic deaths of both Darius Chappell of Clarksville, Tennessee, and Tyrin Johnson of Memphis, Tennessee. Darius Chappell was a 34-year-old father of three young sons, and Tyrin Johnson was a 20-year-old, former student at Tennessee State University and father to a young baby. We will not stand by silently as young Black men die. A federal investigation that turns on the expertise held by career investigators and prosecutors can provide transparency to the community and the country and ensure justice and accountability for any civil rights or constitutional violations.

We also call for immediate suspension of the Memphis Safe Task Force, that has surged federal agents into Memphis despite their lack of training on civilian policing. Since this dangerous operation was launched last fall, there have been no less than four involved fatal shootings, including [another death](#) resulting from a DEA-agent firing into a hotel room this week.

As acting attorney general, you swore an oath to “support, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.” Despite this oath, during your tenure, we have seen the Justice Department fully retreat from investigating these matters. The Department has abdicated its responsibility to prosecute officials who violate people’s civil and constitutional rights. For sure, we have ample reason to doubt your willingness to fulfill that oath with respect to people in Tennessee. In 2023, the Department obtained a federal indictment charging two Lawrence County, Tennessee, officers with federal civil rights violations under 18 U.S.C. § 242 and obstruction offenses arising from the alleged assault of a 61-year-old man during an arrest and their attempts to cover it up. But last November 2025, the Department filed a motion to dismiss the case just before it was set to go to trial. No explanation was offered to the public.

On December 4, 2024, the Justice Department Division released a [comprehensive report](#) regarding the City of Memphis and the Memphis Police Department outlining systemic problems ranging from excessive force; unlawful stops, searches, and arrests; discrimination against Black people; and more. The report outlined recommendations for reform. However, there has been no resolution or litigation to address these gross violations of law. Shockingly, in May 2025, the Justice Department retracted the report, leaving the people of Memphis vulnerable and in harm’s way.

Despite this track record, we call on you now to enforce our nation’s federal civil rights statutes at this moment where we are seeing loss of life at the hands of law enforcement. We join communities

across Tennessee in urging you to uphold your solemn obligation to support, protect, and defend the Constitution by opening federal investigations into these deaths today.

## The Death of Darius Chappell

On June 29, 2026, Darius Chappell, a 34-year-old father of three young sons, was found unresponsive in his cell at the Montgomery County Jail just days after a violent arrest by deputies of the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office.<sup>1</sup> The incident began when a vehicle registered to Mr. Chappell was spotted by law enforcement parked at a local Burger King restaurant.<sup>2</sup> As he was leaving the restaurant, deputies began to pursue Mr. Chappell by foot into incoming traffic, allegedly in connection with a warrant for a parole violation.<sup>3</sup> Videos shared by bystanders show law enforcement tasing Mr. Chappell, yanking him by his hair, and throwing him on to the hot pavement before one of the officers yelled, "Get the dog out!"<sup>4</sup> A Clarksville Police officer who was called for backup opened the back door to his patrol car, deploying a K-9 unit that instantly began biting Mr. Chappell for nearly a minute as he was laying on the ground.<sup>5</sup> A bystander's cell phone recording shows Mr. Chappell screaming in anguish as officers ordered him to "roll over" and "put your hands behind your back."<sup>6</sup>

After his arrest, Mr. Chappell was taken by Montgomery County Emergency Medical Services to Vanderbilt Clarksville Hospital. Reports indicate that he was "medically cleared" before being booked into the Montgomery County Jail.<sup>7</sup> The Sheriff's Office claims that the jail's medical staff also conducted their own medical assessment.<sup>8</sup> Mr. Chappell was reportedly suffering from multiple open bite wounds, which family members say affected his ability to show up for court.<sup>9</sup> Family members repeatedly raised concerns about his health and wellbeing following the harrowing arrest and even requested a wellness check the day before his death when they were

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<sup>1</sup> Andy Humbles, *Family of Montgomery Co. inmate sought help before his death. What happened*, The Tennessean, July 7, 2026, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/local/2026/07/07/clarksville-tn-inmate-family-sought-help-before-his-death-while-jailed/90822806007/>.

<sup>2</sup> Chris Smith, *UPDATE: Report says Chappell stopped for warrant, tasered multiple times on Fort Campbell Blvd.*, ClarksvilleNow.com, July 6, 2026, <https://clarksvillenow.com/local/clarksville-police-issue-statement-on-arrest-of-darius-chappell-who-died-in-jail-cell/>.

<sup>3</sup> Andy Humbles, *Family of Montgomery Co. inmate sought help before his death. What happened*, The Tennessean, July 7, 2026, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/local/2026/07/07/clarksville-tn-inmate-family-sought-help-before-his-death-while-jailed/90822806007/>.

<sup>4</sup> Amber Jayanth, *Tennessee NAACP calling for justice following man's death days after being bitten by Clarksville police dog*, WSMV4, July 4, 2026, <https://www.wsmv.com/2026/07/04/tennessee-naacp-calling-justice-following-mans-death-days-after-being-bitten-by-clarksville-police-dog/>.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> Carlos Miller, *'I Just Want Their Badge': Questions Mount After Black Man Dies In Tennessee Jail Days After Cops Allow Police Dog to Maul Him While Restrained*, Atlanta Black Star, July 7, 2026, <https://atlantablackstar.com/2026/07/07/questions-mount-after-black-man-dies-in-tennessee-jail-days-after-violent-k-9-arrest/>.

<sup>7</sup> Brendan Tierney & Caleb Wethington, *Court documents reveal more details in Clarksville arrest of man bitten by police K-9 who later died while in custody. Here's what we know*, WSMV4, July 6, 2026, <https://www.wsmv.com/2026/07/06/court-documents-reveal-more-details-clarksville-arrest-man-bitten-by-police-k-9-who-later-died-while-custody-heres-what-we-know/>.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> Kelly Avellino, *Family, NAACP demand answers after man dies following arrest involving Clarksville PD K-9*, FOX17, July 4, 2026, <https://fox17.com/news/local/family-naacp-demand-answers-after-man-dies-following-arrest-involving-clarksville-pd-k-9>.

told he was “fine,” yet they believe Mr. Chappell was given little to no medical care for his injuries.<sup>10</sup> Four days later, during a routine check at around 3 A.M., jail officials found him unresponsive in his cell.<sup>11</sup> He was taken back to Vanderbilt Clarksville Hospital where he was pronounced dead.<sup>12</sup>

We understand that the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation has opened an investigation at the request of the 19<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Attorney General Robert Nash.<sup>13</sup> Though the Clarksville Police officer involved in the arrest was reportedly placed on administrative leave, no officers have been charged, and an official cause of death has not been issued.<sup>14</sup>

There is a need for transparency into the fact surrounding Mr. Chappell’s death. Montgomery County Commissioner David Shelton has publicly commented on the case, saying, “This man did not deserve to be dead, no matter [ ] the situation ...” and described the footage as “one of those really horrific things to watch.”<sup>15</sup> The public deserves more information about Mr. Chappell’s care in jail and his condition during his period of detention. The public deserves facts about the force that was used and the extent to which Mr. Chappell was offered medical care while in custody.

### **The Fatal Shooting of Tyrin Johnson**

On Sunday, July 5, 2026, at approximately 4:00 A.M., Tyrin Johnson was fatally shot by two members of the Tennessee National Guard who were operating as part of the Memphis Safe Task Force in downtown Memphis, Tennessee.<sup>16</sup> Johnson was 20 years old and a former student at Tennessee State University who was “focused on building a future in Nashville and Memphis.”<sup>17</sup> A father to a young baby, he recently moved to Nashville and was visiting Memphis for the holiday weekend.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> Andy Humbles, *Family of Montgomery Co. inmate sought help before his death. What happened*, The Tennessean, July 7, 2026, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/local/2026/07/07/clarksville-tn-inmate-family-sought-help-before-his-death-while-jailed/90822806007/>.

<sup>14</sup> Kelly Avellino, *Family, NAACP demand answers after man dies following arrest involving Clarksville PD K-9*, FOX17, July 4, 2026, <https://fox17.com/news/local/family-naacp-demand-answers-after-man-dies-following-arrest-involving-clarksville-pd-k-9>.

<sup>15</sup> Jordan James, *Calls for transparency grow after Clarksville man dies in custody following police dog bite*, WSMV4, July 6, 2026, <https://www.wsmv.com/2026/07/06/calls-transparency-grow-after-clarksville-man-dies-custody-following-police-dog-bite/>.

<sup>16</sup> WBIR Channel 10, *Family grieves after man killed by National Guard in Memphis*, at 01:35 (YouTube, July 8, 2026), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FSemzJ\\_RXk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FSemzJ_RXk).

<sup>17</sup> Kelsey Gibbs, *A Nashville grandfather demands video evidence after grandson killed by National Guard soldiers in Memphis*, NewsChannel 5 Nashville, July 7, 2026, <https://www.newschannel5.com/news/a-nashville-grandfather-demands-video-evidence-after-grandson-killed-by-national-guard-soldiers-in-memphis>.

<sup>18</sup> *2 National Guard members on patrol in Memphis fatally shoot man during pursuit, police say*, CBS News, July 6, 2026, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/national-guard-memphis-fatally-shoot-man-pursuit/>.

On the night of July 5th, different agencies including the National Guard were responding to reports of gunfire in downtown Memphis.<sup>19</sup> While responding, they encountered Mr. Johnson.<sup>20</sup> An anonymous source close to Mr. Johnson stated that he fired a few shots in the air as a warning because he believed he was being followed by people who would hurt him.<sup>21</sup>

Agencies have provided conflicting reports of what followed, however, a Memphis resident who lives near the location of the incident stated that he heard a series of gunshots and saw several National Guard troops running through the parking lot from his bedroom window.<sup>22</sup> The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation reported that Memphis police encountered Mr. Johnson leaving the area on foot.<sup>23</sup> Some reports suggest that Mr. Johnson may have been carrying a handgun, which is permitted under Tennessee's open carry law. Nearby National Guard members joined Memphis police in their pursuit,<sup>24</sup> and soon after two National Guard members opened fire, shooting Mr. Johnson twice in the chest.<sup>25</sup> Mr. Johnson was pronounced dead at the scene.<sup>26</sup>

We understand that the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation launched an independent investigation into Johnson's death.<sup>27</sup> The investigation is ongoing.<sup>28</sup> But this is not enough. The federal government has unique expertise and skill in investigating law enforcement misconduct, and in the case of Mr. Johnson, there are challenges that arise given the involvement of federal officials.

Mr. Johnson's family, friends, and members of the community are demanding answers to his senseless death. State Senators Raumesh Akbari and London Lamar, both of whom represent portions of Memphis in the Tennessee Legislature, released a statement regarding his death: "Tyrin Johnson was just 20 years old — a young father and a student with his whole life ahead of him. As his family mourns this heartbreaking loss, they deserve clear answers about the circumstances surrounding his death."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Imani Williams, *Family, witnesses speak out after National Guard soldiers kill 20-year-old*, Action News 5, July 6, 2026, <https://www.actionnews5.com/2026/07/06/family-witnesses-speak-out-after-national-guard-soldiers-kill-20-year-old/>.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> *TBI Agents Investigating Memphis Officer-Involved Shooting*, TBINewsroom.com, July 5, 2026, <https://tbinewsroom.com/2026/07/05/tbi-agents-investigating-memphis-officer-involved-shooting-11/>.

<sup>24</sup> Kelsey Gibbs, *A Nashville grandfather demands video evidence after grandson killed by National Guard soldiers in Memphis*, NewsChannel 5 Nashville, July 7, 2026, <https://www.newschannel5.com/news/a-nashville-grandfather-demands-video-evidence-after-grandson-killed-by-national-guard-soldiers-in-memphis>.

<sup>25</sup> Jack Brook, *National Guard members on patrol in Memphis fatally shoot man during pursuit, police say*, AP News, July 5, 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/memphis-tennessee-national-guard-shooting-0ee15a07db84a17d709a1f0345858465>.

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*

<sup>27</sup> *TBI Agents Investigating Memphis Officer-Involved Shooting*, TBINewsroom.com, July 5, 2026, <https://tbinewsroom.com/2026/07/05/tbi-agents-investigating-memphis-officer-involved-shooting-11/>.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*

<sup>29</sup> Anita Wadhvani, *National Guard troops on patrol in Memphis fatally shoot 20-year-old man, according to TBI*, Tennessee Lookout, July 6, 2026, <https://tennesseelookout.com/2026/07/06/national-guard-troops-on-patrol-in-memphis-fatally-shoot-20-year-old-man-according-to-tbi/>.

Johnson's grandfather, Evaniel Johnson, a former Davidson County sheriff's correctional officer, is demanding to see footage of the incident.<sup>30</sup> Mr. Evaniel said of his grandson, "[Tyrin] was down there like all the rest of the people trying to enjoy the Fourth of July . . . His future was buying homes, living life, taking care of his little baby. He had a future. It's gone now."<sup>31</sup> According to Mr. Evaniel he was preparing Mr. Johnson to take on larger roles with the family's real estate development business, including overseeing a future project in Nashville. He had dreams of "chang[ing] people's lives, and doing affordable housing."<sup>32</sup>

## **Suspend Memphis Safe Task Force**

We call for suspension of the Memphis Safe Task Force, and its campaign of violence carried out under the color of law, now.

The NAACP conducted a recent survey of Memphis residents on the approval or disapproval of the deployment of the National Guard in their communities. According to the results, 63% of respondents strongly disapprove of the deployment of the National Guard, and 54% of survey respondents perceive that the deployment of the National Guard has significantly undermined the safety and trust of residents.

Law enforcement is tasked with protecting the lives of those in their community, enforcing the laws of their jurisdiction, and keeping people safe. Alternatively, the U.S. National Guard operates under both the state and federal government as reserve units to the military. They are trained to respond to domestic emergencies and civil disturbances.<sup>33</sup> The National Guard is generally not used or trained in civilian law enforcement.<sup>34</sup> It is not surprising to see the chaos and death that has resulted since the launch of the Memphis Safe Task Force.

In September 2025, the President directed federal, state, and local law enforcement and members of the Tennessee National Guard to form the Memphis Safe Task Force.<sup>35</sup> The task force includes officers from the National Guard, Tennessee Highway Patrol, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Internal Revenue Service, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and other federal law enforcement agencies.<sup>36</sup> We understand that 1,450 National Guard soldiers

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<sup>30</sup> Jack Brook & Travis Loller, *Family of man shot by Tennessee National Guard demands release of video*, ABC News, July 6, 2026, <https://abcnews.com/US/wireStory/family-man-shot-tennessee-national-guard-demands-release-134531381>.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> Kelsey Gibbs, *A Nashville grandfather demands video evidence after grandson killed by National Guard soldiers in Memphis*, NewsChannel 5 Nashville, July 7, 2026, <https://www.newschannel5.com/news/a-nashville-grandfather-demands-video-evidence-after-grandson-killed-by-national-guard-soldiers-in-memphis>.

<sup>33</sup> NAACP, *Did You Know? Deploying the National Guard*, available at <https://naacp.org/resources/did-you-know-deploying-national-guard>.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> Press Release, U.S. Marshals Service, *Memphis Safe Task Force Surpasses 10,000 Arrests, Removes More than 1,700 Firearms from City Streets*, June 10, 2026, <https://www.usmarshals.gov/news/press-release/memphis-safe-task-force-surpasses-10000-arrests-removes-more-1700-firearms-city>.

<sup>36</sup> Presidential Memorandum on Restoring Law and Order in Memphis, September 15, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/09/restoring-law-and-order-in-memphis/>.

have been assigned to the Memphis Safe Task Force.<sup>37</sup> As Acting Attorney General, you have publicly applauded the operations of the National Guard. However, reports such as the shooting and death of Mr. Johnson underscore the perilous position that residents find themselves in today.

Since their deployment in October 2025, data from the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation reveals that there have been at least four officer-involved shootings where at least three people have died in incidents involving task force members, with one involving the National Guard.<sup>38</sup> Mr. Johnson's shooting is the sixth TBI use-of-force investigation involving the Memphis' Safe Task Force.<sup>39</sup>

It is no surprise that the deaths of Mr. Chappell and Mr. Johnson have shaken the Tennessee community. Law enforcement misconduct continues to take a toll on Black communities. These tragedies require a full and fair federal investigation led by career officials. We also call for the immediate suspension of the Memphis Safe Task Force.

### **Conclusion**

These tragic deaths are a profound failure of justice. The Department of Justice must open federal investigations now, led by career staff, to ensure full transparency and accountability. The public deserves to know the circumstances leading up to Mr. Darius Chappell and Mr. Tyrin Johnson's deaths. The public deserves truth, justice and accountability from our nation's taxpayer-funded and highest law enforcement agency.

If you have any additional questions, please contact [vcooper@naacpnet.org](mailto:vcooper@naacpnet.org).

Sincerely,



President Gloria Sweet-Love  
Tennessee State Conference NAACP

President Loretta Morris  
Clarksville-Montgomery County NAACP

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<sup>37</sup> Anita Wadhvani, *National Guard troops on patrol in Memphis fatally shoot 20-year-old man, according to TBI*, Tennessee Lookout, July 6, 2026, <https://tennesseelookout.com/2026/07/06/national-guard-troops-on-patrol-in-memphis-fatally-shoot-20-year-old-man-according-to-tbi/>.

<sup>38</sup> Jack Brook & Travis Loller, *Family of man shot by Tennessee National Guard demands release of video*, ABC News, July 6, 2026, <https://abcnews.com/US/wireStory/family-man-shot-tennessee-national-guard-demands-release-134531381>.

<sup>39</sup> Anita Wadhvani, *National Guard troops on patrol in Memphis fatally shoot 20-year-old man, according to TBI*, Tennessee Lookout, July 6, 2026, <https://tennesseelookout.com/2026/07/06/national-guard-troops-on-patrol-in-memphis-fatally-shoot-20-year-old-man-according-to-tbi/>.