September 4, 2022

Montana Attorney General Austin Knudsen

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Attorney General Knudsen,

In August 2019, 18-year-old Kaysera Stops Pretty Places was murdered in Big Horn County, Montana. Three years have passed and your office continues to fail to investigate. It is your duty to ensure this crime is investigated; it is your responsibility to bring Justice for Kaysera.

Kaysera went missing on August 24, 2019 in a suburban neighborhood of Hardin, Montana, less than a half mile from Crow Reservation boundary. On August 29, her body was found in that same neighborhood. Law enforcement knew they had found Kaysera’s body, but did not tell the family that Kaysera’s body had been found until September 11—causing the family to hopelessly search for almost two weeks.

Days before Kaysera went missing, she filmed and posted to social media the beating of her 15-year-old brother by law enforcement at Crow Fair. The officers beating the minor in a wheelchair included Big Horn County deputies. There is reason to believe that one of the Big Horn County Sheriff’s deputies under investigation for the scene filmed by Kaysera was a responding officer when her body was discovered. Also, the Big Horn County Coroner Terry Bullis took Kaysera’s remains to his personal funeral home and coerced her family into cremating her remains, going against the family’s cultural beliefs and destroying any critical evidence that could have further aided the criminal investigation your office needs to undertake. Kaysera’s family has provided the authorities with tips and evidence to aid the investigation, yet they continue to be ignored.

The State of Montana has the fourth highest rate of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (“MMIWG”) in the country. This past May 5, Montana Governor Gianforte proclaimed: “Between 2017 and 2019, over a quarter of Montana’s missing persons were Indigenous despite accounting for about 7 percent of Montana’s populations. Additionally, nearly 80 percent of those reported missing were teenagers younger than 18 years of age.”

This is a crisis. But it is only a crisis because the Montana Department of Justice fails to investigate the homicides of Native people in the State of Montana. On May 5, the Governor of Montana proclaimed that “Montana must bring all resources to bear to track data, raise awareness, and strengthen interagency collaboration to protect Montana’s indigenous persons.” As the top law enforcement officer in the entire State, it is your responsibility to ensure this miscarriage of justice comes to an end. It is your job to bring all resources to bear to investigate the homicide of Kaysera.

Please contact the family of Kaysera immediately to let them know your office will finally fulfill its lawful duty to protect and preserve the lives of Native women living in Montana.

 Sincerely,