



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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**STATEMENT FROM THE MIDWEST REGION OF THE NATIONAL BLACK LAW STUDENTS
ASSOCIATION ON THE EXECUTION OF MARCELLUS WILLIAMS**

The Midwest Region of the National Black Law Students Association (MWBLSA) is deeply anguished by the recent ¹execution of Marcellus Williams, a Black man who, despite substantial evidence raising doubts about his guilt, was denied justice. As future Black legal professionals, we find it devastating to witness yet another example of how our nation’s legal system continues to fail marginalized individuals, particularly Black men, in matters of life and death.

This is not simply a legal issue—it is an issue that cuts to the heart of the systemic inequities Black people face in this country. Marcellus Williams was executed despite ²new DNA evidence that suggested his innocence. This tragic outcome reminds us that our justice system, built on the promise of fairness, too often operates in ways that deny that very fairness to Black and brown individuals. The legacy of racial bias in the death penalty is undeniable. Black people are far more likely to face execution, and cases like Mr. Williams’ reveal the dangers inherent in a system that continues to disproportionately impact our community.

For us, this isn’t just an academic discussion or a theoretical problem—it’s personal. The execution of Marcellus Williams exemplifies how Black life remains devalued in the eyes of the state, and how centuries of systemic racism continue to permeate our legal institutions. It is no secret that the history of capital punishment in the United States is entwined with ³racism, and today it functions as a modern extension of that legacy. The fact that Mr. Williams was executed while serious questions about his guilt persisted is more than an individual failure. It is an indictment of a system that often ignores the humanity of those it is supposed to protect.

¹ Joseph Ax & Brad Brooks, “Missouri executes Marcellus Williams despite pleas from prosecution and victim’s family”, *Reuters*, September 24, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/missouri-man-faces-execution-tuesday-despite-prosecutors-opposition-2024-09-24/>

² <https://innocenceproject.org/cases/marcellus-williams/>

³ Colleen Long, “Report: Death penalty cases show history of racial disparity”, *Associated Press*, September 15, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/united-states-lifestyle-race-and-ethnicity-discrimination-racial-injustice-ded1f517a0fd64bf1d55c448a06acccc>

⁴The Supreme Court’s refusal to intervene in this case raises alarming questions about its commitment to ensuring justice is done, particularly when it comes to the most vulnerable in our society. If the highest court in the land is unwilling to address the possibility of executing an innocent man, it calls into question the extent to which our legal system truly values Black life.

We are acutely aware of the moral and legal weight the death penalty carries. It is a final act, an irreversible punishment. As law students, we are taught that the cornerstone of the American justice system is the presumption of innocence and the careful review of evidence. Yet, in the case of Marcellus Williams, this principle seems to have been disregarded in favor of expediency. Such disregard not only undermines the legitimacy of the courts but also shakes the very foundation of the legal system we are training to join.

The execution of an individual, especially under the cloud of unresolved doubt, is not merely a failure of the courts, but a failure of the values of fairness and justice that we as a nation claim to uphold. If the courts cannot be trusted to safeguard against the execution of the innocent, we must ask: how can we trust them to deliver justice at all? This tragedy demands that we, as future advocates, commit ourselves to pushing for reforms that prevent such irreparable harm.

As Black law students, we recognize the weight of this moment. Marcellus Williams’ case is not an anomaly—it is a reflection of the deep-seated inequalities that plague our legal system. We stand in solidarity with his family and the countless other families who have seen their loved ones swept away by a system that too often disregards their humanity.

In memory of Marcellus Williams and others like him, we will continue to push for meaningful legal reforms, to hold those in power accountable, and to fight for a future in which the justice system lives up to its name. No one, especially not an innocent person, should face execution. We remain steadfast in our commitment to ensuring that the law works for everyone, not just those who have the privilege of navigating it unscathed.

Sincerely,

s/Evan Nicole Gayles

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Midwest Region of the National Black Law Students Association

⁴ David Lieb & Jim Salter, “Supreme Court rejects final request to halt execution of Marcellus Williams”, *Associated Press/PBS News*, September 24, 2024, [rt-rejects-final-request-to-halt-execution-of-marcellus-williams#:~:text=The%20justices%20rejected%20two%20separate,step%20in%20on%20Williams'%20behalf.](#)