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**The Midwest Region of the National Black Law Students Association
Reflects on the One-Year Anniversary of Sonya Massey's Death**

The Fourth of July is recognized as a symbol of freedom, independence, and American democracy. It marked the promise that all men are created equal. However, as we gather to view the fireworks, and wave the American Flag so proudly, we must also confront an undeniable truth; that those promises have never been equally applied.

Unfortunately, this nation's promises and ideals remain out of reach for many Black Americans.

Independence Day honors a dream that many Americans, especially women, Black Americans, immigrants, and other historically underrepresented groups, are still striving to realize. For some, the phrase "liberty and justice for all" is a far-off ideal rather than a daily reality. And one cannot overlook that discrepancy.

Today also marks the one-year anniversary of the tragic death of Sonya Massey, a 36-year old African American woman, a devoted mother of two, and a valued member of the Sangamon County community.¹ Sonya was shot and killed by a Sangamon County sheriff's deputy officer inside her home after she called 911 for help with a suspected intruder.² Sonya was unarmed and in the comfort of her home.³ Before her tragic death, Sonya struggled with mental illness and had been seeking treatment.⁴ According to dispatch records, she had called the mobile crisis line three times in the weeks before her death.⁵ Despite her mental illness, Sonya still trusted that law enforcement would protect her. Sonya trusted the system but the system failed her. Instead of protection and care, she received violence. Her death reminds us that in too many cases, the lives of Black Americans are often not valued. Furthermore, law enforcement's response to those who suffer from mental illness is appalling.

¹ Char Adams, *Sonya Massey's family reflect on her life and a death that sparked national outrage*, NBC NEWS (Aug. 15, 2024, 4:00 AM),

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/sonya-massey-remembered-friends-family-rcna164424>

² *Sonya Massey shooting: Illinois Supreme Court reviews detention of former deputy charged in murder*, FOX 32 (May 14, 2025, 8:34 AM), <https://www.fox32chicago.com/news/sonya-massey-shooting-illinois-supreme-court>

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*



In February 2025, officials in Sangamon County, Illinois reached a settlement agreement with the family of Sonya for \$10 million.⁶ No amount of money, however, can compensate for the loss of Sonya’s life. Her children still live without their mother. Her mother grieves the loss of her daughter. Her community still lives with the trauma.

As we reflect on what this nation professes to stand for, let us keep in mind that patriotism is expressing the truth, not just celebrating. It is refusing to accept performative progress or limited freedom and holding this country to its founding principles.

Today, the MWBLSA honors the bravery and courage of those who have fought and continue to fight for the freedom this nation promised, but never fully delivered. We honor the memory of Sonya Massey, and all those whose lives have been cut short by injustice.

We must confront America’s tolerance of racism. We must move beyond celebration to recommitment to “liberty and justice for all.” Let us remember Sonya Massey not only in mourning, but in action. We must confront the uncomfortable truths of our past and present, and work tirelessly to ensure that this nation’s promises are lived realities for all.

Sincerely,

s/Kyleah Wilkins

Kyleah Wilkins

Attorney General

s/Myla Croft

Myla Croft

Director of Advocacy &
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s/Sehi Jordan

Sehi Jordan

Director of Social Action

Midwest Region of the National Black Law Students Association

⁶ Janelle Griffith, *\$10 million settlement in Sonya Massey shooting case gets final approval*, NBC NEWS (Feb. 12, 2025, 12:40 PM), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/10-million-settlement-sonya-massey-shooting-case-gets-final-approval-rcn a191825>