



Seattle Community Police Commission

NEWS RELEASE

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Remembering Jaahnavi Kandula

Today marks the one-year anniversary of a terrible and avoidable tragedy in Seattle.

On Jan. 23, 2023, a Seattle Police Department officer in a patrol unit responding to a call for service struck and killed 23-year-old Jaahnavi Kandula as she crossed Dexter Avenue near Northeastern University's South Lake Union campus. Ms. Kandula, who was months away from earning a graduate degree in information systems, left behind a grieving family in India and her death hit Seattle's Indian American community hard.

"Her life mattered," Rev. Patricia Hunter, one of the co-chairs of the Seattle Community Police Commission, said at the opening of the CPC's most recent bi-monthly community meeting. "The CPC mourns the passing of Ms. Kandula. We remember her family and friends today and we celebrate her life and how she touched so many in her 23 years of living. And we will be a better and safer city because of Ms. Kandula."

In the days following her death, the CPC posed questions to the SPD and the Seattle Fire Department about the agencies' policies on emergency response. We continue to advocate for policies that protect the safety of the public, and we are working with the Indian American community to collect its members' recommendations.

As our process continues, we will have specific recommendations for policy reform. But we know some things:

- Ms. Kandula's death was completely preventable. It was dark and raining on the night she was struck and killed and the officer was driving well above the speed limit – 74 mph – at the time of impact. The officer was not in pursuit of a felon, but was responding to assist the SFD in response to a possible cocaine overdose. The officer had "chirped" his siren but had not fully engaged it. The case is still under investigation and a charging decision has not been made.
- While SPD written policy on police pursuit (officers chasing a suspect in a vehicle) contains specific rules, its policy on other emergency driving is vague and leaves much to an officer's individual discretion. Officers must use their own judgment to decide if the incident is life-threatening and if weather and traffic conditions and their own driving ability warrants emergency driving.

We are just starting the process of collecting useful community input on policy recommendations, but some themes have already emerged. First, some rates of speed may be too much in any situation in urban Seattle. Second, existing policies are too vague and leave too much to the interpretation of an officer. Without firm rules, there is no accountability. And third, a more precise weighing of risk and benefit must be codified in policy. Citizens deserve timely

police responses during emergencies and calls for service. But they also deserve protection from police vehicles driving at unsafe speeds.

In our engagement with the Indian American community, we heard deep sorrow at the senselessness of Ms. Kandula's death, frustration at the SPD's lack of response and anger at the insensitive comments made by two SPD officers that devalued the life of a young Indian national.

A complete review and rewriting of the city's emergency response policy with broad input from Seattle's citizens could alleviate some of those concerns and help and honor Ms. Kandula's brief life.

Learn more about the CPC at seattle.gov/community-police-commission.