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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FAMILY OF DONTAE MAURICE MELTON, JR. CONDEMNS MARYLAND OAG IID DECLINATION IN IN-CUSTODY DEATH

CIVIL ACCOUNTABILITY AND SYSTEMIC REFORM REMAIN INEVITABLE

Baltimore, Maryland — January 14, 2026

The family of Dontae Maurice Melton, Jr. and their counsel condemn the Maryland Office of the Attorney General's Independent Investigations Division ("IID") decision declining criminal charges in the in-custody death of a young man who was visibly experiencing a mental health crisis and left without medical care while restrained by police.

The IID's conclusion that "none of the subject officers committed a crime under Maryland law" is irreconcilable with the State's own factual findings.

A man in crisis. In police custody. No medical care.

According to the IID's report, on June 24, 2025, at approximately 9:40 p.m., Mr. Melton, exhibiting clear signs of a mental health crisis, approached a police officer near the intersection of West Franklin Street and North Franklinton Road. Officers ultimately placed him in handcuffs and leg restraints and requested emergency medical services ("EMS").

What followed was not confusion or uncertainty; it was inaction.

While restrained on the ground, Mr. Melton became unresponsive. Officers requested EMS five separate times. No ambulance arrived. The IID report confirms that nearly forty minutes passed before officers transported Mr. Melton themselves to a hospital, a hospital located only blocks from the scene, where he was pronounced dead shortly after midnight on June 25, 2025.

Even when City systems fail, Police duties are not optional

Baltimore Police Department policy is explicit and identifies three core officer responsibilities during an encounter:

1. Custody and restraint safety
2. Medical aid and emergency response
3. Crisis response and de-escalation

Once a person is restrained, officers must avoid positions and conditions that increase the risk of injury or death, including leaving a restrained person on hot pavement or in a prone position. Restrained individuals must be positioned on their side or seated and continuously monitored.

BPD policy also requires officers to:

1. Use only force that is reasonable, necessary, and proportional;
2. Reduce or stop force when resistance diminishes;
3. Provide immediate aid to any person injured or in distress following a use of force; and
4. Ensure prompt medical transport when a detainee shows signs of injury, overdose, withdrawal, or medical emergency.

When a restrained individual becomes unresponsive, the obligation is clear: protect life first. That duty does not disappear because a municipal system malfunctioned.

Supervisory failure on scene

The IID report identifies a sergeant acting as the on-scene supervisor, and documents officers seeking guidance after Mr. Melton became unresponsive. Supervisory authority carries responsibility, especially when life-saving decisions must be made.

A supervisor is required to assess the scene, ensure compliance with policy, escalate medical response, and direct immediate transport when EMS fails. The report describes none of that occurring in time to save Mr. Melton's life.

A broken emergency system and silence about it

The IID report acknowledges a critical fact: an extended failure of the City's Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system prevented the Baltimore City Fire Department from receiving EMS requests.

This was not a minor technical glitch. It was a catastrophic systems failure that directly affected a person in police custody who was in medical distress.

Yet neither the State nor the City has publicly accounted for:

1. How long the CAD system had been malfunctioning;
2. Why safeguards failed;
3. What has been done to ensure this cannot happen again.

The public is entitled to answers and protection from other people dying from the government's failure. The family is entitled to accountability.

Larry Greenberg, counsel for the Melton family, added:

"This case highlights exactly why the public has lost faith in the system. The family deserves a thorough accounting and meaningful reforms, not a declination that insulates institutions from responsibility. Mr. Melton should not have died. He was raised to trust the police, and when he was in crisis, they should have protected him. Instead, he deteriorated in their custody until it was too late. This needless loss of life must not be forgotten."

"No criminal charges" does not mean "no responsibility"

The IID expressly states that its analysis is limited to potential criminal liability and does not address civil accountability. The State's decision not to prosecute, while disturbing, does not shield the City, the involved officers, supervisors, or other responsible entities from serious civil exposure.

"The State's report is not the final word," said Larry Greenberg, counsel for the family. "It reads like an effort to avoid accountability. That effort will fail. This family will pursue the truth and responsibility through every lawful avenue available, including civil litigation if needed."

The State cannot blame the victim to excuse official inaction

The family rejects any attempt to weaponize selective language from the medical examiner's report to deflect responsibility. The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner concluded that Mr. Melton's death resulted from a combination of drug intoxication, hyperthermia, and restraint, and classified the manner of death as Homicide.

Whatever contributing factors exist, the undisputed facts remain:

1. Mr. Melton was in police custody;
2. He became unresponsive while restrained;
3. Officers stood by and watched Mr. Melton's life slip away and took no measures to protect him;
4. He did not receive timely emergency medical care.

Melton Press Release
January 14, 2026

The duty to preserve human life does not vanish because a person is experiencing a crisis. The Melton family will not allow Mr. Melton's name to be dragged through the mud to excuse official inaction.

Family statement

"Today's decision is not justice," said Eleshiea Goode, speaking on behalf of the family. "The State reviewed an incident where a young man in crisis was restrained, became unresponsive, and waited nearly forty minutes without an ambulance. Declaring that no crime occurred defies common sense and basic human decency."

Calls to action

The family of Mr. Melton demands:

1. A transparent, independent public accounting of the CAD and dispatch failure, including what safeguards now exist to prevent recurrence;
2. Immediate, enforceable reforms to ensure reliable emergency medical response when individuals are in police custody;
3. Public review and strengthened standards governing police encounters with people experiencing behavioral health crises, centered on the preservation of life.

Justice requires more than reports. It requires accountability.

The family will not allow Mr. Melton's death to be explained away, minimized, or forgotten.

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