**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**February 4, 2022**

**Lebanon County NAACP Files Ethics Complaint against County District Attorney Pier Hess Graf**

The Lebanon County Branch 26AA of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) has filed a complaint with the Disciplinary Board of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania against Lebanon County District Attorney Pier Hess Graf, alleging that she has repeatedly violated the Pennsylvania Rules of Professional Conduct and the canons of ethics that apply to her as a county district attorney.

The complaint focuses on what it calls “a clear conflict of interest and appearance of impropriety” in the discharge of District Attorney Graf’s professional responsibilities, most notably in her office’s investigation of the March 16, 2020 killing of unarmed Lebanon County resident Charity Thome by State Trooper Jay Splain in the early morning hours along a rural road near Myerstown.

“Following the review of the case information by both our criminal justice working group and the executive committee of our Branch, the NAACP filed a complaint regarding the investigative actions and processes executed by the Lebanon County District Attorney,” stated NAACP 26AA President Tony Fields. “Lebanon County residents, especially those living with mental health issues and struggling with addiction, have a right to public service that is fair, impartial, aligned with departmental protocol, and, most importantly, non-lethal.”

About one in four Lebanon County adults struggles with mental health issues. The New York Times article of December 30, 2022 outlined four lethal incidents related to the officer investigated by District Attorney Graf in spring 2020. All of the incidents involved individuals with documented mental health or addiction issues (see Kim Barker, Steve Eder and David D. Kirkpatrick, “After 4 Killings, ‘Officer of the Year’ Is Still on the Job,” *New York Times*, Dec. 30, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/30/us/pennsylvania-trooper-jay-splain-investigation.html>).

“A thorough, unbiased investigation of the use of lethal force is in the best interest of the public and the of the officers involved,” said Fields. “Police officers also face job-related risks, and Lebanon County residents owe it to our police force to reinforce systems and protocols that are accountable and focused on public safety.

People with untreated mental health issues are 16 times more likely to be killed in police encounters according to a study released in 2021 by the Treatment Advocacy Center (see <https://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/evidence-and-research/studies>). Additionally, studies suggest that police officers experience higher than average rates of suicidality (American Police Officers Alliance, 2019, at <https://americanpoliceofficersalliance.com/mental-health-statistics-police-officers/>). Police Officers are at a higher risk of suicide than any other profession (The Addiction Center, 2019, at <https://www.addictioncenter.com/news/2019/09/police-at-highest-risk-for-suicide-than-any-profession/>). Lethal use of force is just one of many job-related traumas faced by police officers that can have a lasting impact on mental health.

“It is our hope that opening a complaint regarding the systems and processes related to investigating lethal use of force will help to build a stronger, safer community,” said Lori Burrus, NAACP Executive Committee member and representative on the Lebanon County Criminal Justice Advisory Board. “I am concerned for public safety, but also for the impact on job performance and mental health outcomes for the officers involved in these incidents.”

The mission of the Lebanon County NAACP is to ensure political, educational, social, and economic equality of all citizens by promoting constitutional rights, civic engagement, democratic processes, and clear accessible information related to discrimination and racial bias.

Lebanon County residents who are interested in learning more, or enlisting the aid of the NAACP in addressing civil rights violations, are invited to visit <https://lebanonnaacp.org/>.

The full complaint is included with this press release.

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