

# Death of Muslim teen was an accident, not a hate crime, police investigation finds

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Hamza Warsame's death Dec. 5 drew national attention and sparked widespread speculation that he might have been the victim of an anti-Muslim hate crime, until it was ruled an accident a month later.

A report released Tuesday by the Seattle Police Department reveals details of the investigation that bolster the King County Medical Examiner's Office's conclusion.

The 16-year-old Seattle Central College student had gone to a schoolmate's tiny apartment in the 300 block of Summit Avenue East to work on a project on homelessness, according to the report released Tuesday in response to a Seattle Times public-disclosure request.

Video surveillance shows the teen and his 21-year-old classmate entering the building around 2:30 p.m.

The two went to the older student's sixth-floor apartment, where police later saw what appeared to be legally purchased marijuana and a bong, the report says.

Warsame told his schoolmate he had never smoked marijuana and would like to try it, and the two smoked together, according to the report.

A toxicology screen by the medical examiner found "relatively high levels" of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the main psychoactive constituent in marijuana, in Warsame's system.

The older student told police he thought everything was fine and went to cook some food, but that Warsame then grew "frantic."

The teen then started talking in agitation about his religion and how he might have put himself in bad standing, and then said he "needed air," police said.

Warsame opened the door and was off the balcony before his schoolmate could react, the report says.

A woman who lived in an apartment below called 911 at 3:35 p.m. after she saw a dark shape falling and then looked down to see a body on the ground, police said. Meanwhile, the schoolmate had rushed outside and was also calling 911, according to the Seattle Police Department report.

Almost immediately after news of Warsame's death spread, rumors about an anti-Muslim assault began to circulate on social media.

Seattle City Councilwoman Kshama Sawant joined the fray, calling for an investigation into the death.

On her blog, she wrote that anti-Muslim rhetoric had spiked after recent terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, Calif. "Some reports suggest he was beaten and thrown from the building in an Islamophobic attack by a fellow student," she wrote.

Sawant asked why Muslims were being targeted and said, "We must come together as a community, united and clear that we will not stand for any threats or hate violence toward our Muslim brothers and sisters."

According to Seattle police detectives, there was no sign of a struggle in the apartment of the 21-year-old.

Police interviewed the neighbor in the apartment below, who told them she was usually able to hear some things that happened in the upstairs apartment quite well, even making out specific words. But she did not hear any fighting or struggling on the day Warsame died, according to the police report.

Police said the medical examiner concluded Warsame's death was an accident after learning that an adjacent building, at 510 E. Thomas St., was only 11 feet away from the Summit Avenue building from which the teen plummeted.

Police said Warsame was 1.5 feet short of reaching the other building's roof.