

Norfolk Inmate Council  
Executive Board  
2 Clark Street / P.O. Box 43  
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October 25, 2024

RE: Death of Jwainus Perry, WR3163

This is sadly another story of failures in care and custody within the Massachusetts Department of Corrections (DOC). In the early morning hours of October 23, 2024 Jwainus Perry a prisoner at MCI-Norfolk passed away from what I and many others believe could have and should have been prevented. Jwainus was someone I worked with since he arrived at MCI-Norfolk just about a year ago. We had never met before and he was very open in seeking help and tools to help manage his mental health needs. Unfortunately I feel I failed him in this as he has died. Everyone is quick to jump to the conclusion that he died from a drug overdose.

However as I and others in the NIC have been advocating for a switch in policy on substance use disorder (SUD's) at MCI-Norfolk and across the DOC for years all falling on deaf ears within the DOC. I and other stakeholders such as Patricia DeJureas, Esq. have sought a different approach to the SUD's (Treatment Over Punishment (TOP)). When this was brought up recently in another NIC / Administration meeting the new Superintendent falling in with prior administrators have adopted an approach of a theory to punish SUD's from the facility. I remember one administrator saying about Jwainus (or "Dub" as those who know him called him), "He's at Norfolk and needs to conduct himself in certain ways or he does not need to be here." This has only escalated the epidemic of SUD's and mental health decline and exasperated the facilities climate. There are alot of people jumping to conclusions this was a SUD (K-2) death but I would caution against that and look to Mental Health failures.

Dub suffered from severe mental health issues and this should not be viewed as an SUD death. He shared many documents with me which I wrote multiple letters without resolve. Jwainus was always concerned about his past mental health episodes which caused harm to others and did not want this to happen again. I remember him saying to me multiple times, "Billy I don't want to hurt anybody but I feel I am losing it and if I lose it I do not want to see the "stuff" (privileges) everybody has here taken." The last time I sat and spoke with him for about a half hour was on the night of October 21, 2024. He said he did not feel he had a grip anymore and was going to try to sleep. Sleeping was an issue for him staying awake for days at a time. When I did see him on his last day of life he seemed better. However the underlying factors of his death was a lack of mental health care and tools to deal with his many underlying issues.

On June 30, 2024 I wrote with Dub a long detailed letter to MCI-Norfolk Administrators as to Jwainus Mental Health decline and what was used to manage his MH at other facilities. This letter was stated as addressing it with Jwainus directly and copied to other administrators. However Jwainus showed me the letter he received and we both felt it was a "brush off". No response to his self harming of late, no addressing his MH stressors. In my and his discussion it was felt and stated in this letter that he was being gas lighted or provoked.

The reason for this is that DOC staff in the past had been assaulted by him at other facilities. However this seemed to play a role in not getting him help. Old grudges from MCI-Walpole etc. coming to Norfolk.

In my opinion this was an epic failure by administrators and lack of the level of mental health care he desperately needed. Maybe they just don't have the tools in place to address behavioral issues, maybe too much focus on punishment and not treatment.

On the night of October 22, 2024 running into the 23rd from what I have been told by eye witness prisoners. Dub had helped a prisoner to his cell because he was under the influence around 9:30 PM, Jwainus stated to someone I need to help this brother and get him back to his cell. He had that kind of heart for his fellow men. Around 11:30 PM Jwainus had his door pegged and the window blocked. Another prisoner knowing Dub was on an extremely high level of MH medications asked the officer to allow him to try and get him up and not press the button (cell for assistance) placing Dub in disciplinary actions possibly, as every medical emergency at MCI-Norfolk is taken as an overdose. The prisoner looked in with a mirror and rattled the door until the peg came loose. When he finally got in about 20-30 minutes later, he claimed to have found Dub blue and unresponsive. According to this prisoner he was able to get Jwainus onto the bed and begin chest compressions and told other prisoners to get the officer which they did. He was reported to be blue but with a pulse. Jwainus had slumped down in a squatting position restricting his breathing. Prisoners in the vicinity said they heard medical staff pronounce Jwainus dead at 12:12 AM after working on him for about 45 minutes. By all reports staff tried to revive Dub with EMT's on site who said "We don't stop as long as he has a pulse". The Coroner arrived and removed his body around 3:00 AM.

Mental health staff have 30 minutes per patient each month and for most prisoners if you don't have a diagnosis or are not a management issue then you don't receive a treatment plan. Prisoners that see mental health have problems opening up to them and building a trust because they are here for only a short time and are not people of color or unrelatable.

Let me tell you who he was that I did not understand until after his death and upon reflection. I just thought he was a guy I was helping to form letters and advocate for. But he was a guy who I would stop in and talk to 1-2 times a week for 30-45 minutes or more. He was always a friendly guy and wanted to see people stand up for themselves. Even though he struggled with his own MH he always had a bit of advice for me as to effects of my own long term segregation. He hated giving in and perceived weakness. Dub always thought outside the box on what I was doing in the NIC relating events of today back to our early days in prison and his own experiences. We would laugh and scratch our heads about the direction of the DOC as far as their motivational factors as to things that made or makes no penological sense. We had become friends. It was never said but guys said to me after his death that Dub really respected me and my work. Once again thinking back I wish I could have done more and still look at the last notes I took when speaking with him and thinking how he was failed and deserved more. I did not only help him but he helped me and gave me insight and motivation even today that will live on in me.

*William J. Duda*