

Milwaukee County Sheriff David Clarke Should Resign or Be Removed

Written by GBP Staff

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State legislators call for Clarke's removal in a public letter Wednesday. The Milwaukee County Jail, under the Sheriff's supervision has experienced four recent deaths resulting from a lack of intake screening for substance abuse and mental illness.

MADISON - Senator Chris Larson, Representative Jonathan Brostoff, and Representative Christine Sinicki, whose districts all include Milwaukee County, released a letter on Thursday calling for the resignation or removal of Milwaukee County Sheriff David Clarke.

"As public servants of Milwaukee County, we understand the importance of ensuring that our neighbors are treated with dignity and respect. With four families grieving over the unnecessary loss of their loved ones in the past six months, it has become clear that our county's sheriff department has been grossly mismanaged," said the three in the letter. "It is our duty and moral obligation to echo the sentiments of our constituents and fellow representatives by calling for the immediate resignation of Sheriff David Clarke."



Under Clarke's watch, the downtown jail facility has experienced a lack of intake screening for substance abuse and mental illness, which has contributed to four recent, tragic deaths.

1. Shadé Swayzer, 30, gave birth while in custody. Corrections officers ignored Swayzer's plea for help after her water broke. She went into labor on July 14, giving birth at 4 a.m. Her baby was pronounced dead later that morning, due to the lack of proper response by staff.

2. Terrill Thomas, 38, was found dead in his cell on April 24. His death was ruled a homicide caused by dehydration. Thomas suffered from bipolar disorder and was awaiting a psychiatric examination at the time of his death. He was, according to family members, in the throes of a mental breakdown at the time of his arrest. His death occurred nine days after corrections officers reportedly shut off the water from his cell and ignored pleas by Terrill and other inmates for water.

3. Kristina A. Fiebrink, 38, was found dead in her cell on August 28. A call from family

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members for an independent investigation into her death is still unfulfilled.

4. Michael Madden, 29, died October 27. The Milwaukee Medical Examiner report alleged he died from hitting his head. His injury may have been treatable if corrections and medical staff properly screened Madden for substance abuse and monitored him more closely.

According to the three State legislators, these deaths were preventable and tied directly to Clarke's lack of supervision of his Department. No officer has been disciplined, no policy has been changed, and the public has not been given adequate information.

Inquiries to discover the truth behind these tragic deaths have resulted in resistance from Sheriff Clarke. When the county's chief medical examiner, Brian Peterson, released basic information about an inmate's death, Sheriff Clarke responded by threatening him.

"Without a change in course, we need not wonder if another death will occur under Clarke; the only question is **when**," the legislators said.

As far back as 2006, Sheriff Clarke has been forcing members of his department to participate in Evangelical Christian conversion sessions until these actions were declared unconstitutional by a federal court. Over the years, Clarke's actions have resulted in wasting nearly a half of a million dollars in legal fees, paid for by Milwaukee County taxpayers.

According to the legislators, Clarke has further proven his disregard for civil behavior by sending out incendiary tweets calling for 'pitchforks and torches,' while leaving residents to wonder why the Sheriff has neglected to investigate wrongful deaths in his custody.

"The people of Milwaukee County deserve answers," say the three. "The families and friends of Michael Madden, Terrill Thomas, and Kristine Fiebrink deserve answers. Shadé Swayzer deserves to know that no other mother will lose their newborn baby under Clarke's gross mismanagement."

The three legislators conclude that, if Sheriff Clarke continues to refuse to step aside, Governor Walker should utilize his authority under Wisconsin State Statute 17.09 (5) and remove him

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from office.