



July 5, 2007

Video Commentary

I commend Jason Cherkis for his excellent cover story “Man Down!” (6/29). It was well-written, meticulously documented, and exposed conditions to the public that the city would prefer to keep hidden behind jail walls.

I represent the family of Thomas Jones, the “man down.” His nickname was Jamie, and his little girl, named Jamie after him, is 6 years old. Recently, she was in my office and asked to look at photographs of her daddy. Her cute, innocent face lit up as she kissed his image. Heartbreaking. Thomas Jones’ mother, Jennifer, still cries when she talks about her son’s death. Other family members, such as Crystal, his sister, and Derrick, his brother, have suffered as well.

I believe it was institutional indifference that allowed Thomas Jones to die on a cold gym floor surrounded by poorly trained correctional officers who failed to follow jail protocols. Comments posted in response to the City Paper article reflect public dismay by ordinary people at the events documented on video. Mr. Jones’ mother prays that the public now will demand better training at the jail and change its culture.

There is hope. Since Jan. 20, 2005, a new director, Devon Brown, has been installed at the Department of Corrections. Adrian Fenty was overwhelmingly elected as mayor to fix D.C.’s broken bureaucracy. It is my belief that both Director Brown and Mayor Fenty are good, decent people and that they will reject the indifference that led to Mr. Jones’ death. I hope, therefore, that the city does the right thing. It must reform training at the jail, and it is morally bound to establish a trust fund for Thomas’ little girl, Jamie, to enable her to attend college.

Yet I am troubled by the early response to the City Paper’s reporting. District lawyers now are seeking a court order prohibiting dissemination of the video and other materials that are already part of the public record.

So, is it a bad thing that the public has learned of conditions in the jail? Or will the city make it right? The answer should matter to all people of conscience and good will because, in the words of Jones’ mother, “the next video could be your son.”

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