



FOLLOW THAT STORY

Department of Corrections Apologizes

Late last year, **Jennifer Durham** settled her lawsuit against the District regarding the death of her son, **Thomas Jones**, who suffered a heart attack while playing basketball inside the D.C. Jail. A video of the incident showed that corrections officers had failed to perform CPR or even the most basic life-saving measures on her son ("Man Down," 6/27/07). The settlement provided a six-figure sum to Jones' young daughter. It wasn't enough for Durham's attorney **Douglas Sparks**. He wanted Department of Corrections officials to meet directly with Durham and prove to her that they've made changes.

On March 10, Durham and Sparks met with corrections officials at its headquarters on Vermont Avenue NW, where they were greeted with a surprise: DOC Director **Devon Brown** had decided to run the session himself. The meeting lasted nearly two hours. Sparks says Brown began the meeting by doing what few officials ever do—he apologized. Another official soon pulled out detailed spreadsheets showing that the entire corrections workforce had been certified in everything from basic first aid to the operation of portable defibrillators—a key issue in Durham's lawsuit.

"It was the first time in my career—and I've been doing this almost 30 years—I've ever seen anyone in the DOC...show such compassion," Sparks says. "It's the first time I've had them say they're sorry."

When it was Durham's turn to speak, she told stories of her son and talked about what it was like to see the video of him dying on the gym floor. She cried. She came away from the meeting satisfied.

"It made me feel like what [my son] went through, what he went through, it mattered. It made a difference," Durham said at the time. "You know, I feel pretty good behind it."

POSTED BY JASON CHERKIS
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