

# VIRGINIA OFFICIALS RETALIATE AGAINST PRISONER WHO SET HIMSELF ON FIRE AND EXPOSED ABUSES AT RED ONION (2025)

By Kevin "Rashid" Johnson

The name Ekong Eshiet has become widely known in the media, after he and numerous other prisoners set themselves on fire in desperate efforts to be transferred away from the racist abuses at Virginia's Red Onion State Prison.

After a series of lies and coverups staged by Virginia prison officials to sweep the abuses at Red Onion and these desperate reactions to them by victims under the rug, a Virginia Delegate, Michael Jones made a surprise visit on December 30, 2024 touring the prison and speaking to prisoners and staff there. He left with numerous critical findings about conditions at Red Onion that needed immediate correction, among them were racist mistreatment of Black prisoners, substandard food (in quality and quantity), use of attack dogs, transfer process, medical care, educational and vocational opportunities, and so on.

Among the prisoners that he spoke with were Ekong, and Charles Coleman who also set himself on fire at the prison. Upon leaving Red Onion Delegate Jones expressed that, "what impacted me the most were the self-immolation incidents."

Immediately after this legislator's visit, Red Onion officials went to work retaliating against Ekong for speaking to him, attempting to set him and his family up for physical harm. They not only spread false rumors that Ekong is a snitch to numerous prisoners, but also gave his family's personal addresses to other prisoners. Every prisoner, and those acquainted with prison culture, knows that spreading such rumors is in many cases a death sentence or at very least likely to lead to ongoing violent attacks against the victim of such rumors. And now in Ekong's case, against his family as well.

This is an example of Red Onion and these remote Virginia prison officials at work.

His sister among others of his relatives have already been seriously impacted by these criminal acts of Red Onion officials.

Not only is racist and inhumane abuse inflicted on the people in these hidden prisons, but Virginia officials, including the prison system's director Chadwick Dotson, initially lied to the public claiming there were no prisoner

self-immolations calling the reports "ludicrous," then when legislators revealed that there in fact were at least six of them, Dotson claimed the prisoners had nothing to protest and were just being manipulative. But now, a state Delegate has visited the prison and left with findings that EVERYTHING we've said about racism and abuse, abuse of attack dogs, arbitrary transfers to and from the prison and more ARE ALL TRUE!

And now in response to this exposure and to terrify others from coming forward so the abuses might continue or be denied by victims and witnesses, Red Onion officials have moved to set Ekong and his family up for violent attack or death.

Racist abuse, lying coverups and denials from the highest levels of government, then deadly retaliation against victims and witnesses and their families to silence exposure going forward...

This is your government at work.

What I found most disappointing was the legislator's proposed response to his findings, particularly with regard to the racism and abuse. He stated that it should be left to the prison system's leadership to retrain staff to end racist practices. If that were a viable solution, there would have been no need for decades of mass resistance that often became deadly to end racial segregation and extend basic civil rights to people of color in Amerika, or the deadliest war on U.S. soil to be waged to end racial slavery. If officials honestly believe that all it takes to end racist and abusive practices is to bring such practices to the attention of the perpetrators, then the very logic of the U.S. criminal justice system collapses. All that is needed to end crime is to tell the criminals they're breaking the law and trust they will stop on their own.

Not only is the racist abuse in Virginia's remote prisons the making and doing of the prison system's leadership, but that very leadership went in the media lying not just about these conditions but about the men at Red Onion setting themselves on fire in desperate efforts to get out of those conditions. And as I pointed out in a recent article, "Who Running the Virginia Prison System?", the prison system's leadership at its Richmond headquarters are transplants from the remote regions where this racist abuse is happening, and they are purging the prison system of predominantly Black-staffed high-security prisons under the racist notion that Blacks aren't competent and can't be trusted to run such prisons, while concentrating Black prisoners at these rural white-staffed prison which is a large part of why the racist abuse is occurring.

The facts are out! What more needs be revealed by any claimed investigation? In fact with the retaliation that Ekong and his family are now facing, evidence of the abuses at these prisons will definitely be suppressed and victims and witnesses intimidated into silence. It's absolutely absurd to pretend they will end their own abuses and purge themselves of their own racist views and practices - abuses and practices they've denied in lies to the public and are now retaliating against their victims for exposing.

There is but one solution, close these remote sites of racist torture and abuse down and fire their leading administrators!

Dare to Struggle Dare to Win!

All Power to the People!

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Endnotes:

1. Phil Wilayto, "Virginia Black Caucus Member Conducts Unannounced Visit to Red Onion, Scene of Self-Immolations," The Virginia Defender, Jan 1, 2025
2. Luca Powell, "Richmond Delegate Made Surprise Visit to Red Onion, Calls for More Oversight," Richmond Times Dispatch, Jan 1, 2025  
[http://richmond.com/news/local/government-politics/red-onion-prison-jones/article\\_a5562cfc-c84e-11ef-b5a5-030eb6f8f648.htm](http://richmond.com/news/local/government-politics/red-onion-prison-jones/article_a5562cfc-c84e-11ef-b5a5-030eb6f8f648.htm)