

# A MOTHER'S RESPONSE TO PRISON CHIEF'S LIES AND ONGOING ABUSE OF HER SON AT RED ONION STATE PRISON (2025)

by Kevin "Rashid" Johnson

Tomeka Wallace is the mother of Demetrius Wallace, one of several Black men who set themselves on fire in latter 2024 at Virginia's notorious Red Onion State Prison, in desperate response to racist abuses at the prison.

She has witnessed and experienced just how corrupt, deceitful, and meaningless the Virginia government and its systems of redress really are.

It all began when Demetrius was brutally beaten while he was repeatedly called racist names, by a mob of white guards at Red Onion on Nov 23, 2023. The attack was triggered by him looking at a white female sergeant Terri Smith while he was handcuffed from behind and kneeling, after she made provocative remarks to him. In response to his merely looking at her she tear gassed him and the beating commenced.

Where else but the U.S. South does a Black man looking at a white woman constitute a "threat" justifying a brutal assault by a white mob?

The beating was captured on these guards' body cameras. I wrote about this and a series of similar assaults that I witnessed during my brief return to Red Onion that year. (1) Demetrius also filed litigation against the abuse. From this came continued retaliation.

They destroyed his valuable property including his television. His visits were blocked by the same guards who beat him, because the visitor was a white woman. His meals, showers and other basic rights were denied. His mail, email and telephone access are being denied.

Throughout all this Tomeka petitioned for help for her son. She contacted wardens, numerous federal and state legislators, and other officials, asking for help. She was lied to, strung along, told over and over again that the abuses would be looked into, that investigations were going to be done, that things would be alright. Nothing changed. Demetrius remained at Red Onion where abuses continue.

These abuses pressed at her son until he reached a point of desperation.

On August 23, 2024 he set his leg on fire, in a desperate act to get moved from Red Onion. The very same people who were abusing him were left to get him medical help. The Major, Johnny Hall, who had repeatedly lied to Tomeka about her son's situation, withheld needed emergency burn care from Demetrius for days until infection set in. When he was taken to the burn unit at Virginia Commonwealth University's Medical Center, physicians questioned why he hadn't been brought in immediately, protesting that he would have to undergo treatment for the infection before the third degree burns could be tended to. He remained in the hospital for two weeks, underwent two surgeries and a skin graft. Demetrius was then sent back to Red Onion.

During October 2024 I was able, through recorded reports, to bring attention to his situation and numerous others at Red Onion who also set themselves on fire in desperate response to racism and abuses there. Numerous media outlets picked up the story.

Tomeka witnessed Chadwick Dotson, the director of the Va prison system, lie in the media lying about her son's and the other men's situation, claiming no one set themselves on fire and nothing was amiss at Red Onion, and the reports were just abolitionists and radicals taking cheap shots at the prison system and he would not respond to them.

Only days later, the state legislature would go in the media admitting that at least six men did burn themselves and questioned why. Dotson then switched horses, villainizing the victims, claiming the burnings were acts of manipulation and mental illness, and no mistreatment was going on at the prison, and that he invited several legislators to visit Red Onion.

Immediately a Va delegate, Holly Siebold, responded in a Dec 6, 2024 letter denouncing Dotson's claims. She had just visited Red Onion in May 2024 after I and numerous others went on lengthy hunger strikes in response to abuses and ongoing long term solitary confinement there. My strike lasted 71 days. Siebold said the conditions she witnessed at Red Onion were "inhumane."

After this another delegate Michael Jones of the Black Caucus paid a surprise visit to Red Onion on Dec 30th. He spoke to staff and prisoners, including two of the Black men who set themselves on fire. He attempted to speak with Demetrius, who didn't believe there was really a delegate there to see him. He thought officials were trying

to set him up for another assault, so he refused to come out of his cell to talk to Jones.

After the visit Jones issued a press release stating his findings. Among them he identified racist abuses of Black prisoners, inadequate food, arbitrary assignments to the prison, and lack of adequate medical care.

This confirmed the inhumane abuses under which Tomeka's son was suffering, that Dotson denied existed, and officials gave her false promise games to correct.

But even with these exposures, abuses of Demetrius continued. While he and I were housed together in a solitary confinement cellblock together at Red Onion during Nov 2024, the ranking nurse Holbrooke told him she had seen a Tic Toc video I made about his situation, and he should stop talking to me. That if he persisted he might be kept in solitary for months or years. When he persisted that he would not stop talking to someone who was helping expose his abusers, she extended his burn treatment so he'd remain at Red Onion and delay his already approved transfer out of state.

A few days later he was targeted with a strip cell status for no reason, leading to his being assaulted in a cell raid by a mob of guards in body armor. He was moved to another unit.

In response to continued abuse he recently went on a hunger strike and was put on a suicide watch status as a result, being denied his basic property, he was slammed face first by a group of guards while handcuffed behind his back, punched in the face by a guard using handcuffs like brass knuckles injuring his face, he was threatened by the warden David Anderson and major Johnny Hall to not speak to the media after The Appeal reporter Elizabeth Weill-Greenburg reached out to Tomeka and Demetrius for interviews. He was also called racist names by Red Onion unit manager Larry Collins.

In response to all of this Tomeka has continually appealed to officials to intervene to help and protect her son, including delegates Jones and Siebold. NOTHING has been done, nothing has changed.

I recently spoke with Tomeka and asked her to tell me exactly how she is left feeling in the face of officials lying while knowing and delegates admitting the abuses

occurring at Red Onion, yet nothing is being done to help her son who continues to be targeted with abuse, assaults, threats and racist insults.

She says she fears for her son's life, and is at her wit's end. This is her child and she's done EVERYTHING as a law abiding citizen that she can think to do and that various so-called advocates have advised her to do, with no results. She has followed the script laid down by those in government, to stop the illegal abuses of her son by those in government. She has run into nothing but brick walls. She feels "Ready to drive up there...."

She questions why her son is in this remote prison, and why, as I also question, all of the predominantly Black-staffed high security prisons across the state have been and are being closed down, while new ones are being opened up only in rural white segregated communities like where Red Onion is located, exposing predominantly Black prisoners like Demetrius to racist abuses that high level officials like Dotson lyingly pretend don't exist. She points out that Sussex 2 prison was just refurbished, so why was it closed down she asks.

Why with all the exposure and publicity surrounding Red Onion are these men still being abused, while legislators are telling the public to trust that these same abusers to end their own abuses?

These remote prisons need to be shut down. As long as they continue to operate the racism and abuses will continue.

Dare to Struggle Dare to Win!

All Power to the People!

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Endnotes:

1. Kevin "Rashid" Johnson, "Beating Time: Racist Abuse Continue at Red Onion State Prison" (2023) <http://rashidmod.com/?p=3534>

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(MOTHER'S RESPONSE part 1/2)

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