

# **JUSTICE FOR ERROL GREENE**

*WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW*



## ***What this text is for***

At this point many Winnipeggers will be familiar with the story of Errol Greene. His passing in May of 2016 at the Winnipeg Remand Center (WRC) has led to an ongoing campaign for justice and answers for the family, as well as generating a greater scrutiny of the brutality of the WRC. This pamphlet was put together to give people an idea of the circumstances surrounding Errol's passing, what's happened since, and offer some ways that people can help out with the campaign.

## ***The story***

Errol was brought into the WRC on the Friday (April 29), after being arrested on a minor breach while on bail for a minor charge. He had been on his way home when he was picked up because of having been drinking despite his bail conditions not to drink. Ultimately the fact that his neighbourhood is so heavily policed, and police regularly racially profile and harass young Indigenous people, helped lead to his arrest and death.

On May 1, 2016, Errol was on the phone with his wife Rochelle, and he felt a seizure coming on. He'd already requested the medication multiple times, and had expressed worry to her and his cellmate Stephen King about what might happen if he kept being denied. He'd even explained to Stephen how to take care of him if he were to go into a seizure. When he started seizing, Rochelle heard the phone drop and the commotion from her end of the line. She screamed through the phone hoping that someone would help her husband.

Stephen was the first to respond. He jumped up from his game of chess and followed Errol's instructions to put him in the fetal position and let him go through his episode. About a minute later, guards showed up and took over, despite the fact that the situation was under control. They told everyone to go to their cells, and instead of helping Errol, they flipped him face down and knelt into his back while he was still seizing. They shackled and handcuffed him. They asked around about his name, not even knowing who he was let alone what was going on with his health.

After he was taken to a cell and left alone, still shackled and cuffed the guards ordered the janitors to clean up the area where this all went

down. An inmate claims it took three towels to mop up all the blood that needed to be cleaned up. For those unfamiliar with epileptic seizures, blood is not common, and this amount should have been very concerning. But Errol was left in his cell alone, his call button was never answered, and fellow inmates remember him calling for help and for his mother for an hour until he suddenly fell silent.

A guard who was posted outside Errol's cell looked inside and, seeing Errol on the ground, not moving, went to ask for help. It took about 15 minutes before any medical help showed up. Once the paramedics arrived, they attempted CPR but gave up. One inmate heard them say "he's gone" at around 3:05 PM. Stephen King describes their exit with Errol on a stretcher as "not in a hurry". They didn't seem to think that he could be — or was worth — trying to revive in hospital.

Errol wasn't officially pronounced dead by the Chief Medical Examiner in the hospital until 8:27 PM, some five hours after paramedics unofficially called it at the WRC. His original cause of death certificate listed "internal bleeding", though seizures do not cause internal bleeding.

### ***The official response***

On May 10, CBC reporter Kim Kaschor published a story citing many of the people we've mentioned so far (Rochelle, Stephen, another inmate named Kyle Waite). In response to the story, on May 12, the Manitoba Government Employees Union (MGEU), which represents the guards, released a statement about what it called "the remand center incident". After quickly expressing "sympathies" to the family, the president of the union expressed support for the guards, encouraged them to participate in the investigation, and moralized about not making any judgements until all the facts are known.

But people are not buying this. First off, the guards do not deserve support after someone dies on their watch. Second, investigations of deaths in custody function almost without exception as cops pretending to investigate each other and then claiming that they did everything right, that what happened was inevitable and not their fault.

This is not a way to find out what happened, it's a white-washing operation. And finally, the MGEU president expects us to withhold judgement until all the facts are known. Well, we have a lot of facts, from many

inmates who saw everything happen. Until we hear something else convincing, we feel confident that we know what went down, whether the MGEU wants to cry about it or not.

On October 7, 2016, MGEU president Michelle Gawronsky had a letter published in the Winnipeg Free Press that claimed that “MGEU is not the employer and has no authority to conduct such investigations” and that “correctional officers take their responsibility to ensure the health and safety of inmates and each other very seriously.”

Yet correctional officers are represented by the MGEU, a large union which has consistently tried to protect them from criticism and distract from Errol’s death by pointing to systemic issues in carceral facilities (which it only seemed to become interested in to change the subject).

As for Manitoba Justice, who runs the WRC, or the WRC itself, it took until early August for them to even release any statement. In fact, the timing (coming on the heels of a Prisoner Justice Day 24 Hour Vigil action outside the WRC) seems to indicate that they may have only released the statement in response to the level of public scrutiny they were facing.

An inquest into Errol’s death was finally called in December. This is a step in the right direction. However, inquests have their own inherent problems, often featuring a lack of financial accessibility for families and the victims often ending up getting blamed for their own deaths.

The so-called investigation that preceded it doesn’t offer much hope either. Neither Rochelle (Errol’s wife) nor any other inmates who’ve been in touch with the family or supporters have been contacted by investigators. These are some of the most direct witnesses. If there is indeed an investigation, waiting over a year to contact key witnesses doesn’t show much concern for any voices other than, presumably, the guards themselves. We cannot put any hope in a sham investigation, whatever justice that can be wrestled from this situation will come from the streets and public pressure.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the autopsy done on Errol’s body, was delivered almost three months late, taking six instead of three months. There was no explanation. These types of

delays lend themselves quite easily to speculation about cover-ups, or waiting until things “cool down”. They’ll have to wait a while yet, for us to cool down!

### ***The real response***

On May 13, members of the Urban Warrior Alliance who were still taking part in the occupation at the Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada offices, organized a rally outside the front doors of the WRC. It was attended by many members of Errol’s immediate and extended family, as well as others who wished to show their support. Just under two weeks later another vigil took place organized by a group which came together specifically to respond to Errol’s death and support his family.

Events like this continued to take place over the course of the summer with vigils happening roughly once a month (two vigils in May, one in June and one in July).

Prisoner Justice Day, a yearly event where inmates and their supporters remember the deaths of their fellow prisoners, has been taking place on August 10 for decades. This year, the Justice for Errol crew organized a 24-hour Vigil outside of the WRC to mark the date. People took shifts and for 24 full hours we held space outside the WRC as a reminder to the guards of our persistence and determination, as well as to show inmates what kind of support they can count on.

On October 3, the first day of the provincial government’s fall session, a rally was organized outside the Manitoba legislative building to remind the government of their responsibility towards Errol’s family. Some opposition MLA’s spoke, as well as Stephen King, who shared more about being there for Errol in some of his last moments.

Errol and Rochelle’s fourth child was born the next night, actually in the early morning of October 5. Errol Junior joined his older siblings Darrien, Precious, and Sage at a hard time, but in a time of strength too. Supporters and family organized a baby supply drive to help Rochelle with the tough job of being a single parent of four with a newborn.

A panel discussion was held at Thunderbird House on November 1, including Leslie Spillett (longtime Indigenous activist, executive director of Ka Ni Kanichihk), Chantell Quill (sister of Terry Quill who died at Stony

Mountain Institution in 2013), Tracy Booth (longtime director of the Elizabeth Fry Society of Winnipeg) and Cecil James (brother of Kinew James who died at the Regional Psychiatric Centre in Saskatoon in 2013), moderated by Bronwyn Dobchuk-Land (organizer with the Bar None Prison Rideshare Project and lecturer in criminal justice at the University of Winnipeg). On December 8, Justice for Errol held a protest outside of MGEU headquarters, pushing for the union to take a leading role in the pursuit of justice for Errol and other murdered prisoners.

May 1, 2017 marked the one year anniversary of Errol's death. We once again organized a vigil outside the Remand Centre, and were supported by a number of groups and a crowd of roughly 70-80 people.

### ***Why we do this***

There are different reasons for everyone to do this work. Some of us knew Errol, some didn't. Some of us have been to the remand center, some of us haven't. Some of us are involved in

lots of work against prisons, some of us are just getting started. Here's a quick rundown of some reasons why this is important work to do.

Errol Greene should still be here. Hollie Hall should still be here (Hollie died of "a flu-like illness" after going un-treated at the WRC on March 17th). Robert McAdam died in there on September 4th. Russell Spence on October 12th. Lance Harper on October 25th. And the list goes on. These deaths are so preventable, that it's not enough to call them an accident. People are supposed to "learn" from accidents, but these deaths keep happening. There have been all kinds of inquiries and inquests, but their recommendations are never implemented into law and policy. It's clear that the lives of inmates aren't important to the guards, or the administration of the WRC, or Manitoba Justice.

These deaths don't happen in a vacuum. They devastate entire families and communities. People have to live without a sibling, a partner, a parent, a child, a dear friend. All because a few guards didn't think it was important to save someone from dying a preventable death. And they did that because they knew they could get away with it, that no one was going to fire them, nevermind charge them with murder.

As we mentioned earlier, investigations don't go anywhere, but just rub-

ber-stamp the lies guards tell to protect themselves and their co-workers. Families beg for answers and face a wall. Any documents from an investigation that make it into their hands are filled with blacked out pages. The whole system does everything to prevent anyone from facing repercussions for this tragic loss of life.

Manitoba has the worst pre-trial incarceration rates in the country. 70% of people locked up in the province haven't been convicted. This is because people are denied bail. When people do get bail, they get tons of stupid conditions put on them. Those conditions are enforced by racist cops who over-patrol and racially profile people in their own neighbourhoods. So folks end up breaching because they're out past curfews, have had a drink, have a no-contact order with family members, all conditions that make no sense but make it easy for cops to pick someone up and throw them back into remand. And next time this person goes for bail it's harder. And the jails fill up.

This system is either so broke that you can't even tell what it's trying to do, or if it's doing exactly what it's meant to do. Either way it needs to be fought because we don't want any more deaths like this. We don't want families and communities cut off from each other by these walls. Inquiries and inquests haven't helped, no one in power is coming forward with a credible plan to put an end to this garbage. No one in a position of power regarding Errol's death has reached out to his family with anything whatsoever. Well, they've left us with no other choice! We're gonna fight them!

### ***What you can do***

There are so many ways to help out with this fight, on all kinds of levels. Here are some:

- Like and share the "Justice for Errol Greene" facebook page, and make sure to stay tuned to it as we announce the newest plans. Sharing the page's posts really does help, so please don't be shy about it!
- Come out to rallies, vigils, actions. Bring some friends. Bring some family. Talk to people about your plans to attend these events and encourage them that coming out isn't as scary and intimidating and pointless as they may think. We need people to show up! This really helps!

- Once you're at the event, feel free to come introduce yourself to an organizer if you're interested in becoming more involved in planning and organizing. We sometimes meet, organize using facebook, it's really easy to get involved in lots of different ways.

- Make some art, a poster, a song, etc that expresses what you think about this situation and share it with us on our page! Take a selfie with "#JusticeForErrol" and some words about why you support the campaign and do the same! We want to know all the people who are down, and keep it fresh.

- Invite organizers of the campaign to speak to your class, church or mosque, whatever group that you're a part of that would have us! We want to spread the word far and wide.

- Call a bunch of people. Make it fun! Hang out for a bit with some friends and just each call all of these people and harass them. They deserve much worse!

- o Adult Corrections: 204-945-7309

- o Associate Deputy Minister of Justice: 204-945-7291

- o Remand center: 204-945-3540

- o Minister of Justice Heather Stefanson's Office: 204-945-3728

- o Minister of Justice Heather Stefanson's constituency office: 204-487-0013

- o MGEU: 204-982-6438

- Contribute to, and spread the word about our crowdfunding campaign for legal fees in the upcoming inquest into Errol's death. All the info you need is on the facebook page.