



TESTIMONY FOR JOINT HEARING
***Safety of Persons in Custody, Transparency, and Accountability within State
Correctional Facilities***

Written by Melanie Baker, CCA member

Subject: Urgent Testimony on Behalf of Zachery Bishop (DIN: 19B2742) and the Need for Immediate Prison Reform

I am writing as a mother whose faith in our correctional system has been shattered. On **April 2, 2024**, during a visit with my son, **Zachery Bishop (DIN: 19B2742)** at Five Points Correctional Facility, he collapsed into my arms, weeping. My six-foot-tall son, who has spent the last two years in the Honor Block without a single ticket, cried uncontrollably on the visiting floor. That moment broke me in a way I can never describe. It is every parent's worst nightmare to watch their child suffer, especially when they are powerless to intervene.

Everything below was dictated by Zachery on the visit floor that day — **April 2, 2024** — and reflects a deeply troubling pattern of abuse, denial of medical and mental health care, and possible retaliation due to his new religious beliefs.

Statement from Zachery Bishop (Dictated on the Visit Floor April 2, 2024)

- On **March 31, 2024**, Zachery was ordered to lock in his cell after what he says was a misunderstood compliment to a female officer, after he admittedly was drinking as a way to cope with his uncomfortable feelings after a recent DVSJA hearing regarding his childhood trauma and abuse.
- Upon locking in, he began having a **mental health crisis**, he repeatedly requested to go to OMH, he was told you know you have to say "the magic word" and so he replied that yes, he was suicidal.
- After declaring he was suicidal, he was **frisked** and his **Qur'an was thrown down the hallway** by CO Gersher.
- He was transferred to suicide watch, **while crying** and repeatedly **mocked and threatened** by correctional officers. He was told, "just wait till we get you in the infirmary, no cameras and we have more bodies than you, Bishop"
- He was **beaten while naked in the suicide room**, kicked in the genitals and the head, and denied medical care. He named the COs involved in the beating when he reported it to OSI. No final determination has ever been given to him in regards to his grievance and report.

- When I saw him on April 2nd, I documented visible **bruises on his legs, a swollen and possibly broken hand, a bump behind his ear, and signs of a concussion**. He had been repeatedly denied medical care despite asking officers, a deacon, and staff.
- His **personal property was missing or destroyed**, including religious items, and he was forced to sleep on a **metal frame with no mattress for days**. Upon my in person visit several days after the assault in the infirmary. I stopped the Dep of Security who was walking around reminding people of no visits on Eclipse day and I asked her politely if he could at least get a mattress since it had been several days. By the time he returned from the visit he did have one.
- Upon Zachery being cleared from suicide watch, he was placed in a cell with another struggling individual, who was later murdered at Five Points possibly by his cellmate, Adam Lafferty. They found a **razor that didn't belong to either of them**, a situation that could have ended tragically. Both refused to touch it out of fear regarding why it was there.
- In response to him reporting the assault in the infirmary, officers began spreading **false claims about his criminal charges**, putting his safety at risk, and **mocked his conversion to Islam**, singling him out as the only white man attending Ramadan services.

Observations of Zachery's Injuries During the April 2, 2024 Visit

During my visit, I, **Melanie Bishop**, observed the following injuries on my son **Zachery Bishop**:

- **Right hand**: Very swollen, bruised, and disfigured — most likely broken.
- **Left leg**: Large hand-sized green and blue bruise on the inside lower leg, with a cut in the middle.
- **Right leg**: Multiple purple bruises.
- **Right ear**: Large bruise and bump behind the ear, with a slight cut on the front of his forehead hairline.

Zachery reported to me that he had been experiencing a **pounding headache** since the incident and woke up **dizzy** the morning of **April 2, 2024**. He believes he may have suffered a **concussion**.

During the visit, I purchased two click-click photographs and we attempted to document the injuries to his **left leg and hands**. Due to the flash of the Polaroid camera, the bruising was hard to capture clearly, but the **cut on his left leg** was visible, and we were able to photograph his hands side by side. I have these photographs as evidence.

As of the time of the visit, Zachery had repeatedly requested medical attention from officers on his block (Block 10), a Deacon who visited on **April 1, 2024**, and from officers on the visit floor. However, **his requests for medical attention were still being denied.**

My Call to Action

As a mother, I beg you: **protect our incarcerated loved ones.** These facilities are not simply punitive spaces — they are responsible for the **well-being** of human beings, including our sons and daughters.

I urge you to:

1. **Pass legislation that protects in-person visitation.** It is a lifeline. Without that visit, I would never have known the extent of my son's suffering.
2. **Mandate transparency and external oversight** of correctional facilities. Cameras, incident logs, and audio recordings must be reviewed when allegations of abuse arise.
3. **Pass the Earned Time Act.** Give people the opportunity to grow, to heal, and to have hope. Zachery had two years without a ticket. He found faith. He was trying to be better — and he continues to try in the face of ongoing lockdowns, lack of programming, restricted movement after a Wildcat strike. In addition, Zachery has repeatedly requested access since he enter prison to Alcohol and Substance Abuse Treatment (ASAT) programs and has been repeatedly denied due to "lack of time left on his sentence." As a mother and taxpayer, I find that unbelievable. We are concerned with Contraband but offer no real credible solutions such as programming and earning good time only the status quo or punitive measures. Too many of our sons and daughters have substance abuse disorders as a result of childhood traumas and then enter prison only to experience and endure ongoing or new traumas. This does not make our communities safer or our families whole.
4. **Protect religious rights and mental health access** inside DOCCS. No one should be denied care because of their beliefs.

Zachery has already suffered more than his sentence intended. I fear for his life and mental well-being. If we cannot protect those in our custody — if we cannot even ensure they are treated as human beings — then we have failed as a society.

I can tell you since I viewed the horrific video of the murder of Robert Brooks I have had many sleepless nights. I saw so many similarities to my son's experience as I saw in that video of Mr. Brooks. My son was not given a death sentence. My son was a first time offender who has already learned a difficult lesson that prison is not the place he wants to be. This is not his path but he has no way to show who he truly is today. He is also loved. He is an uncle, a brother, a grandson, and so much more than his biggest mistake. Please pass meaningful legislation, this year, to guarantee that my son and countless others have HOPE and that they have the opportunity to earn their way home sooner. This is not a get out of jail free card. Finally, pass

these laws to show the men and women inside that will return to our communities that you see what they have endured, that they have held it together, and that their lives matter.

Thank you for hearing my testimony. As a mother, please keep in mind that there are countless mothers who carry heartbreak and hope in the same breath and still choose love—over and over again. We ask you to do the same.