

November 13, 2014

From: the Stop Legal Lynching campaign

To: Mayor Ed Murray and Seattle City Council
600 4th Ave, Seattle, WA 98104
(206) 684-8888

Dear mayor and city council,

We are a diverse group of community members and activists. We are writing concerning a troubling court case which may reveal possible complicity of Seattle police officers Chase and Clay with mob violence against anti-police brutality activist Matthew Erickson. We are asking you to investigate the behaviors of officers Chase and Clay. We are also asking you to investigate the actions of Judge Rosen, who presided over what we believe was an unjust trial of Mr Erickson, where he was criminalized for defending himself from the mob attack.

Matthew Erickson grew up in South Seattle and has been a vocal critic of police brutality, especially as it effects Black communities, communities of color, and working class/poor communities in the city. He is one of the founders of Seattle Copwatch (a group that films the police to ensure they do not harass or brutalize people). He was also a prominent member of the Decolonize/ Occupy Seattle movement.

Last year, Mr. Erickson was filming officers Chase and Clay at Westlake park as they were harassing a young man of color. While he was filming, the officers called over a crowd of youth, telling them it would be "dangerous for them" to have Mr. Erickson around. The youth began to threaten Mr. Erickson with weapons, demanding that he stop filming the police. It appears that the two officers incited the crowd; at the very least, they allowed the crowd to attack Mr. Erickson.

Fearing for his life, Mr. Erickson defended himself by holding a knife in front of him as he backed away from the crowd. He did not actually hurt anyone with the knife. The two officers arrested him at gunpoint; they did not arrest any of his attackers. He dropped the knife, and as he was arrested he covered his face and upper torso out of fear the cops might allow the crowd to attack him further. Indeed, video footage from the Pacific Place mall security cameras shows the officers rolling him toward the crowd, and at least one individual in the crowd stomps or kicks him as he is held down by the officers.

Because of this situation, Mr. Erickson was recently tried and convicted of resisting arrest and use of an illegal weapon, in a trial presided over by Judge Rosen. His public defender failed to argue the fact that his knife was indeed legal. There was not a single Black person on the jury, so it was not a jury of his peers. And Judge Rosen instructed the jury not to consider Mr. Erickson's actions self-defense, claiming he should have relied on the police officers for safety instead of using his knife, even though there is evidence they incited the crowd and/ or granted them impunity to attack him.

Because Mr. Erickson is a well-respected member of multiple, diverse communities, dozens of people came out to his trial to support him. When people expressed spontaneous verbal reactions to the clearly unjust verdict, Judge Rosen had them arrested and slapped them with maximum contempt charges (30 days each for two people, and eight for the third). He also set a ridiculously high \$50,000 bail for Mr. Erickson; his friends and supporters raised the bond for this on short notice.

To many of us, this is an unsurprising situation; it is a continuation of what Michelle Alexander calls the New Jim Crow regime, where Black people are disproportionately criminalized due to lack of

adequate defense representation, and court procedures that favor the prosecution. To some, this may seem to be a bizarre incident; it might seem unbelievable until one watches the footage and hears the court testimony (which is available at <http://stoplegallynching.wordpress.com>). In either respect, this situation calls into question the city of Seattle's claims to be a diverse and racially equitable city. It also calls into question the Seattle Police Department's community policing initiatives, which officers Chase and Clay mentioned they were a part of during their trial testimonies.

We demand that you convene an investigation into the behaviors of officers Chase and Clay, and Judge Rosen. We demand that you allow friends and supporters of Mr. Erickson to be a part of the investigatory team to ensure proper transparency and community accountability. In particular, we demand answers to the following questions:

- 1) Did officers Chase and Clay incite the crowd?
- 2) Why did they allow the crowd to attack Mr. Erickson?
- 3) Were these officers motivated by a political and/or personal vendetta against Mr. Erickson due to his vocal opposition to police brutality and his activities copwatching (filming the police)? Was this incident retaliation for complaints he had filed against them, or verbal criticisms he had made against them in public?
- 4) What is the exact nature of the "community policing" relationship these officers have established with youth in the Westlake Park area? Are they engaged in any sort of unethical relationships with these youth? Are they granting impunity to these youth, allowing them to engage in violence against critics of the police, in return for some sort of financial or social benefit to the officers themselves? Or are they granting impunity to the youth to attack other marginalized people as long as they reinforce the police as some sort of vigilante force on the streets? If any of these things are happening, how far up the SPD chain of command does the corruption go, and are these practices also happening within community policing efforts in other Seattle neighborhoods? We know the city runs a Youth Violence Prevention Initiative. Are there also youth violence *instigation* initiatives within the Seattle Police Department? If so, are these authorized or rouge operations?
- 5) Why did Judge Rosen choose such punitive measures during the trial? Is he biased in favor of officers Chase and Clay? Is he allowing the officers to hide something the public should be aware of? Is he contributing to the silencing of a prominent critic of the police by having him locked up?

Other questions may arise in the course of the investigation, as more information becomes available.

We will continue to publicly reiterate these demands at every available opportunity until you meet them. We want to make sure that what has happened to Mr. Erickson does not happen to other Seattle residents. We support all communities' demands for an immediate end to police brutality, racial profiling, racist vigilantism, and mass incarceration. We want to make sure that what happened to Trayvon Martin and Mike Brown does not happen to someone in Seattle, and that what happened to John T. Williams does not happen here again.

We urge you to take immediate, concrete steps to investigate this situation. You can reach us at stoplegallynching@gmail.com. We look forward to hearing your response.

Sincerely,
The Stop Legal Lynching campaign