

11/12/14

TO: Judge Steve Rosen  
FROM: Edward Mast  
RE: Matthew Erickson, case # 589641

I'm a homeowner in Wallingford and I was present at several sessions of the recent trial of Matthew Erickson over which you presided. I have known Matthew Erickson for several years and have come to know him as a community organizer and youth activist. He has experience and resources that we should be employing to help our city's vulnerable young people; but instead his skills and experience are being squandered and wasted by the ongoing battering that he is receiving at the hands of a judicial system that has refused to give him reasonable treatment for years.

In the recent trial, it was clear — and you noted yourself — that Matt was not receiving adequate defense. The prosecution made several claims that were clearly false, and the defense failed to bring forward the contradictions that were obvious to most of us watching. There was no actual evidence supplied about the legality or illegality of the knife which was at the center of the trial, and which the prosecutor kept calling “brass knuckles” and “switchblade”, both of which we could see were untrue.

Even regardless of what is alleged to have happened before the videotaped events, it is obvious on the videotape itself that the police were allowing other people to chase and attack Matt, that they made no attempt to stop the attackers, and that Matt was only holding a weapon in the attempt to keep them away. Your decision that he could or should have called the police for protection makes no sense in these circumstances, and your decision demonstrates a refusal to understand the ongoing mistreatment that can bring a citizen to lose all trust in law enforcement.

Matthew Erickson and I are from very different backgrounds, and in coming to know him I have been forced to confront some of my own prejudices. I have always considered myself an anti-racist, but as I learn more about the invisibility and depth of white privilege, I have learned that many of us still have deep and pervasive negative prejudices against African-Americans and other people of color. I hope you will at least consider the possibility that these pervasive prejudices have played a role in the outcome of this trial. Please consider the most lenient possible sentencing for Matthew Erickson.

Edward Mast