



# WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE

*State Capitol, PO Box 8953, Madison, Wisconsin 53708*

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **CONTACT:**

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Today, Senator Chris Larson, Representative Jonathan Brostoff, and Representative Christine Sinicki released the following statement urging the resignation or removal of Milwaukee County Sheriff David Clarke.

“As public servants of Milwaukee County, we understand the importance of ensuring that our neighbors are treated with dignity and respect. With four families grieving over the unnecessary loss of their loved ones in the past six months, it has become clear that our county’s sheriff department has been grossly mismanaged.

“It is our duty and moral obligation to echo the sentiments of our constituents and fellow representatives by calling for the immediate resignation of Sheriff David Clarke. Under Clarke’s watch, the downtown jail facility has experienced a dangerous lack of supervision leading to improper intake screening for substance abuse and mental illness, which has contributed to these recent, tragic deaths:

- Shadé Swayzer, 30, gave birth while in custody. Corrections officers ignored Swayzer’s plea for help after her water broke. She went into labor on July 14, giving birth at 4 a.m. Her baby was pronounced dead later that morning, due to the lack of proper response by staff.
- Terrill Thomas, 38, was found dead in his cell on April 24. His death was ruled a homicide caused by dehydration. Thomas suffered from bipolar disorder and was awaiting a psychiatric examination at the time of his death. He was, according to family members, in the throes of a mental breakdown at the time of his arrest. His death occurred nine days after corrections officers reportedly shut off the water from his cell and ignored pleas by Terrill and other inmates for water.
- Kristina A. Fiebrink, 38, was found dead in her cell on August 28. A call from family members for an independent investigation into her death is still unfulfilled.
- Michael Madden, 29, died October 27. The Milwaukee Medical Examiner report alleged he died from hitting his head. His injury may have been treatable if corrections and medical staff properly screened Madden for substance abuse and monitored him more closely.

“Each of these deaths were both tragic and preventable. These deaths are tied directly to Clarke’s lack of supervision of his Department. Appallingly, no officer has been disciplined, no policy has been changed, and the public has not been given adequate information.

“Moreover, inquiries to discover the truth behind these tragic deaths have resulted in resistance and hostility from Sheriff Clarke. When our county’s chief medical examiner, Brian Peterson, released basic information



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about an inmate's death, Sheriff Clarke responded by threatening him. Without a change in course, we need not wonder *if* another death will occur under Clarke; the only question is *when*.

“Sheriff Clarke has shown a longstanding pattern of irresponsible behavior. As far back as 2006, Sheriff Clarke was forcing members of his department to participate in Evangelical Christian conversion sessions - his actions were declared unconstitutional by a federal court. Over the years, Clarke's actions have resulted in wasting nearly a half of a million dollars in legal fees, paid for by Milwaukee County taxpayers. Most recently, he has proven his complete disregard for civil behavior by publicly calling for ‘pitchforks and torches,’ leaving our neighbors to wonder why the Sheriff has willfully neglected to investigate wrongful deaths in his custody, yet still finds time to send incendiary tweets?”

“The people of Milwaukee County deserve answers. The families and friends of Michael Madden, Terrill Thomas, and Kristine Fiebrink deserve answers. Shadé Swayzer deserves to know that no other mother will lose their newborn baby under Clarke's gross mismanagement.

“Sheriff Clarke continues to ignore the concerns of the neighbors he is sworn to serve and protect. If he continues to refuse to step aside so someone else can fill the void of leadership, Governor Walker must utilize his authority under Wisconsin State Statute 17.09 (5) and remove Sheriff Clarke - a dangerous menace - from our community.”

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*Senator Chris Larson represents the 7<sup>th</sup> Senate District; which includes: Milwaukee, St. Francis, Cudahy, South Milwaukee, Oak Creek, and Franklin.*

*Representative Jonathan Brostoff represents the 19<sup>th</sup> Assembly District; which includes: Milwaukee's River West, East Side, Downtown, and Bay View neighborhoods.*

*Representative Christine Sinicki represents the 20<sup>th</sup> Assembly District; which includes: Milwaukee's Bay View neighborhood, St. Francis, and Cudahy.*