

PRESS RELEASE
September 26, 2016

Contact:

Joe Piette – [610-931-2615](tel:610-931-2615)

Suzanne Ross [\(917\)584-2135](tel:917-584-2135)

Pam Africa [267-760-7344](tel:267-760-7344)

HepCure4Mumiaallprisoners@gmx.com

FAMILY, FRIENDS RALLY OUTSIDE MAHANAY & FRACKVILLE PRISONS OVER WATER, HEP C ISSUES

Family and friends of prisoners and prison rights activists held signs and handed out fliers outside SCI Mahanoy and SCI Frackville on September 25. Of primary concern were complaints by prisoners that tap water is brown and foul smelling. Two activists who visited Mumia Abu-Jamal inside Mahanoy reported afterwards the water is still undrinkable.

Prisoners told Pam Africa and Charlotte O'Neal the foul-smelling, discolored water leaves an oily sheen on their skin after washing or showering. At Mahanoy, inmates are only allowed three small cups of water at meals, while at Frackville prison prisoners are given a gallon of water daily. There is not even clean water to purchase, forcing the imprisoned brothers to rely on soda and juices from vending machines. This is not only expensive for persons with very little money but a serious danger to those with diabetes and unhealthy for everyone because of high sugar content. Water is needed for life and as such is considered a basic HUMAN RIGHT. The prison officials are threatening the prisoners with lockdown so they cannot call and report what's going on.

Participants handed out fliers that explained these problems are not just issues for prisoners. The surrounding communities also have dirty water problems.

Pam Africa represents the International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal (ICFFMAJ). Charlotte O'Neal was a member of the Kansas City Black Panther Party in the 1960's and has been active for many years in Tanzania.

Hepatitis C impacts 6000 PA Prisoners

Demonstrators also voiced concern that the Department of Corrections still refuses to give inmates the cure for hepatitis C, despite an August 31 court decision finding the state's hep C protocol unconstitutional. Over 6,000 inmates in PA prisons – including unfairly convicted political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal - have hepatitis C, a deadly disease which the DOC refuses to treat with the most recent medical cures.

Abu-Jamal explained to his visitors his skin still itches and he continues to take medicine to relieve the discomfort, even though it causes diarrhea. He and other prisoners are suffering from these and other symptoms of hepatitis C, which could be eliminated if the DOC treated with them with Sovaldi and Harvoni. These drugs are up to 99% effective.

The pharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences, Inc owns the patent for the hep C cure and has a monopoly on the medication. Gilead charges up to \$1,000 for one pill and between \$84,500 - \$94,500 for the full 12-week treatment. In India, the government set the price of one pill at \$4 and \$378 for the full treatment.

By not curing Hep C in prison, this contagious disease will spread within our communities as prisoners are released and transmit the virus to their partners. Most families are in no position to pay for the exorbitantly priced medicines their loved ones need once they are home.

Activists are demanding that officials:

- Investigate the reports of water problems at once
- Immediately give all prisoners an adequate supply of bottled water for drinking
- Give prisoners access to clean water for showering and personal use
- Organizers are demanding free treatment with the Hep C cure for all who are suffering with the disease.
- We also demand that the PA DOC immediately treat Mumia with the Hep C cure as well as the 6,000 prisoners in the state who are at risk of dying from the untreated disease.

In August of 2015, Mumia sued members of the PA Department of Corrections for failure to treat him with the known cure for Hep C. Last month, on August 31, 2016, US District Court Judge Robert D. Mariani ruled that the DOC's Hep C protocol for treating PA prisoners is unconstitutional, violates the 8th Amendment, and engages in "deliberate indifference to the known risks which follow from untreated chronic hepatitis C." Arguing that prisoners have rights to health care, he established that "the standard of care for individuals with chronic Hepatitis C is no different within the prison walls than in the community.

Judge Mariani's ruling nevertheless denied Mumia's request for a preliminary injunction that would have allowed the judge to order his immediate treatment. The Judge denied the motion on a technicality – that Mumia's lawsuit did not name members of the DOC's Hepatitis C Care Committee, the body charged with treating prisoners with Hep C. An appeal on this ruling has since been filed.

In addition to the ICFFMAJ, the rallies were organized by the International Action Center; The MOVE Organization; and Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Coalition NYC.