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Protest demands justice for Marlyn Barnes

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On Oct. 5, a few dozen activists with the Prisoner Solidarity Committee gathered outside the Harford County Detention Center in Bel Air, Md., to protest the untimely death of father of five Marlyn Barnes and demand justice for all prisoners suffering unjustly. The detention center is located approximately 35 miles northeast of Baltimore City. As documented in [The Afro](#), Barnes died on April 10 in the custody of the Harford County Sheriff's Office, which operates the detention center.

Local law enforcement declared Barnes' death a suicide after a rapid investigation.

Since then, the family has faced obfuscation, unclarity and stonewalling from the Harford County authorities and the Maryland state Chief Medical Examiner's Office. This has included a delay of two months in making the autopsy available, providing incorrect information to the family regarding public information act requests and general refusal to meet with the family.

Furthermore, when the family, through an attorney, finally did obtain surveillance video of the detention center from the day of Marlyn's death — it was exceedingly low in quality. The video was highly pixelated, inexplicably smudged and lacking audio. The most recent installment in this saga of misdirection and confusion was a letter from the Harford County sheriff, Jeffrey Gahler, denying the family attorney's request to meet and deferring to his office's legal counsel.

Sheriff Gahler does not seem to be interested in providing answers regarding what happened the day that Marlyn Barnes' life was tragically cut short. For this reason, family members, joined by local activists and community members, picketed the Harford County Detention Center on Oct. 5. Miss Marlyn Barnes addressed the audience, making it clear that she is only interested in truth and justice for her son. She also emphasized that this issue goes beyond just her son. Millions of working-class people, particularly Black and Brown people, experience abuse, discrimination and sometimes death in detention centers across the United States.

Local activists also raised the specific conditions at the Harford County Detention Center and a sheriff's office with a checkered past. Since 1996, over a dozen inmates have "committed suicide" at the Harford County Detention Center. This is the second highest rate in the state of Maryland. The number is especially high when considering that most prisoners in detention centers are there for no more than a few days. On top of this, the Harford County Sheriff's Office has come under scrutiny for racist police practices and its level of cooperation with federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The Prisoner Solidarity Committee is calling for a full people's investigation into the death of Marlyn Barnes, including a meeting between the family's attorney and various Harford County officials. The committee has requested the full release of the names of individuals incarcerated at the detention center who are believed to have witnessed Marlyn's death. Moreover, the committee believes the entire Harford County Sheriff's Department should be investigated for racist policing practices and generally inhumane conditions at the detention center.

