



PIPE DREAM

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Activists protest Broome County sheriff's re-election

Group protests local jail conditions, inmate deaths

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Pipe Dream News

Community members and Binghamton University students gathered outside of Broome County Sheriff David Harder's re-election party last Thursday to protest the local prison system.

Donning posters that said, "There is nothing just in our justice system," and "A jail sentence = a death sentence," Justice and Unity for the Southern Tier (JUST), a local advocacy group, rallied at 81 Court St. in Downtown Binghamton to protest the treatment of inmates in the Broome County Jail.

In a statement released by the group, JUST declared that the rally was for "justice and less jailing." In its statement, JUST said Harder has resisted admitting responsibility for the conditions at the Broome County Jail and committed to the continued use of isolation for juvenile inmates.

Kevin Revier, a member of JUST and a sixth-year Ph.D. candidate studying sociology, said the rally was held at Harder's re-election party to increase publicity on the abuses occurring in the jail.

"We hope to overall work against further investment in the jail, with aims to shrink the jail size, and support efforts in allocating resources for treatment, mental health, and community support,"

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Protestors advocate for better medical treatment

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Revier wrote in an email.

The rally comes after the Broome County Jail lost a class-action lawsuit on April 4. The lawsuit, filed by Legal Services of Central New York in July 2017 on behalf of the juveniles held in Broome County Jail, was against the continued use of solitary confinement of 16- and 17-year-olds in the facility.

JUST held a similar protest during the Broome County Jail's open house in fall 2017, where the group and community members protested jail conditions and spoke out against jail deaths.

JUST's statement urged Harder and the county to explain their support for what they called expensive, ineffective and dehumanizing strategies. The policies they denounced include allowing male guards to watch female prisoners while they shower and use the restroom, and inadequate medical attention for inmates. They also noted that six inmates have died under Harder's tenure as sheriff in the last five years. A study from the United States Department of Justice found that in 2013, only 18 percent of local jails across the country reported inmate deaths.

Bryce Lawson, a junior

majoring in business administration, has been involved with JUST since his sophomore year. Lawson said he reached out to student organizations such as the Black Student Union, College Progressives and the Frances Beal Society to help join the rally.

"We rally because we believe that people have power when they organize," Lawson wrote in an email. "Rallying against Sheriff Harder lets those that are incarcerated in [Broome County Jail] know that there are people looking out for them and that we care about their lives."