**A Tragedy That Should Have Been Avoided**

Following a critical incident involving the police and deadly force, it's crucial to thoroughly investigate what went wrong and what could have been done differently. Considering the tragic events in Auburn on June 15th, it's clear what went wrong, where the justice system fell short and who bears a large part of the blame in yesterday’s events.

In the early morning hours of July 15, 2024, the Auburn Police Department and the Maine State Police responded to a domestic violence call involving a firearm and shots being fired on Russell Ave. But before delving into the details of this call for service, let's discuss the suspect and his criminal history.

Leein Hinkley, a career criminal was released early from prison in July 2023 after serving only a small portion of a 20-year sentence for an Elevated Aggravated Domestic Violence Assault charge. This charge stemmed from Hinkley stabbing a former girlfriend in the presence of her 18-month-old child. During the vicious attack, Hinkley also stabbed an innocent bystander who stepped in to help the victim. After Hinkley's release, he was placed on probation with the remainder of his original sentence looming over him should he commit any more criminal acts. Unfortunately, last month Hinkley did just that.

On May 24, 2024, Leein Hinkley was arrested for a new felony, a Domestic Violence Aggravated Assault, while still on probation for the previous crime that he had committed and was in prison for. Due to the new charges, a probation violation hold was placed on Hinkley by the Maine Dept. of Probation and Parole. On June 5, Hinkley’s latest victim applied for and was granted a temporary Protection from Abuse order, which was served on Hinkley.

At the very start of this case, the judicial system started to fail. On June 7, 2024, Judge Sarah Churchill lowered Hinkley’s bail to $5,000 cash for the new charges and continued the hold on his probation violation. Less than a week later, on June 12, against the strong advice and very vocal objection of the Androscoggin DA’s Office, Judge Churchill removed Hinkley’s probation hold and further lowered his bail to $1,500 cash. Hinkley was released that day.

A mere three days after his release, Leein Hinkley and true to his long and documented criminal past, again disregarded his probationary status, his conditions of release, and an active protection order. Hinkley went to his former girlfriend’s house, armed with a firearm. The events that took place shortly thereafter include two homes burned to the ground, a former girlfriend who narrowly escaped certain death by jumping out a window, another deceased victim who was in the home, and finally Leein Hinkley’s ultimate death after opening fire multiple times on responding police.

In hindsight, we can determine that the Androscoggin District Attorney’s Office did its job. They knew that Hinkley had a high likelihood of recidivism, and they knew they had an obligation to protect the victim in this Domestic Violence incident. They did their job arguing in court to keep Hinkley incarcerated. Furthermore, Hinkley’s former girlfriend also stepped forward and looked to the court for help and obtained a Protection from Abuse order.

The responsibility now squarely falls on Judge Sarah Churchill. Despite the severity of Hinkley's prior criminal charges, a victim seeking help from the court, and opposition from prosecutors, Judge Churchill essentially let him off the hook. After two weeks of incarceration on new criminal charges and violating his probation, Judge Churchill cited Hinkley's Sixth Amendment right based on a failure to obtain legal counsel as the reason for his release. This poor judgment shows a blatant disregard for the safety of a victim of domestic violence and public safety. If Leein Hinkley had remained incarcerated as he should have been, the events of June 15 would not have taken place. Judge Churchill's poor judgment led to the loss of life and property and put the public and responding police officers in the line of fire from a man who should have remained locked up. This tragedy should never have occurred. We demand better judgment in our courts and accountability for Judge Sarah Churchill's incompetent actions.

**Statement released on the behalf of the;**

* **Maine State Trooper’s Association**
* **Maine Fraternal Order of Police**

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