



Solitary Survivor Swept Up in Narcotics Raid Stands Trial

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Who: The Abolitionist Law Center’s Court Watch program, alongside a coalition of advocates, lawyers, and supporters, will gather outside of the courthouse before packing the court for the trial of Tashon Burke, a survivor of 8 years in solitary confinement

What: Demonstration calling for the release of 30-year-old McKeesport resident, Tashon Burke

Where: Courtroom Number 327 at Allegheny County Courthouse at 436 Grant St., Pittsburgh, PA 15219

When: Wednesday, February 8 at 8 a.m. EST

PITTSBURGH, PA—Just days after the Allegheny County Jail came under fire at the Jail Oversight Board meeting for its [failure to adhere to the ban on solitary confinement](#), 30-year-old Tashon Burke stands trial for charges caught after the state released him straight from solitary confinement to the streets of McKeesport. Due to a weeks-long lockdown at Allegheny County Jail in 2022, Burke’s mental health has deteriorated, forcing him to endure the trauma of isolation all over again and heavily rely on psychotropic medication.

Burke spent eight consecutive years in solitary confinement in Pennsylvania state prisons. In a piece published on Solitary Watch, Burke [vividly describes](#) the excruciating torture of solitary confinement: “You start to feel the walls closing in around you and you become trapped, breathless, and claustrophobic.” Burke illustrates the emotional rollercoaster of maxing out from his 10-year prison sentence, catching a glimpse of freedom, only to be re-incarcerated for a crime he did not commit.



Releasing individuals [directly from solitary confinement to the streets](#), especially with little to no preparation, has proven to have [severely detrimental effects](#) on a person's mental health. In Burke's case, not only did prison officials fail to provide critical mental health treatment before releasing him but they also failed to provide him with a home plan.

Burke was only in the streets for eight days before a [joint task force](#) of the McKeesport Police Department, the District Attorney's Narcotics Enforcement Team (DANET), the Allegheny County Police, and federal partners at the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and Drug Enforcement Administration raided the house of Burke's brother in September 2021, a move that had been [planned long before](#) Burke was released from state prison. Upon finding exorbitant amounts of contraband, officers arrested all those in the house, including Burke.

Burke, like a disproportionate amount of Black men across the country, got swept into the state's widely cast carceral net and arrested for simply being at the wrong place at the wrong time. Having only been home for just over a week, Burke could not have possibly coordinated the high level sale of narcotics and guns as alleged. A coalition of organizations and individuals have come together to demand freedom for Tashon Burke and provide support in court during the trial.

ALC Court Watch is a group of volunteers based in Allegheny County, PA. A court watch program monitors the courts at the district and county levels. Court watch volunteers attend and observe sessions, record data, and their impressions to promote transparency and encourage transformation in our judicial process. We are committed to transformative, racial justice by keeping the courts accountable through observation, data collection, and public reporting. ALC Court Watch is a project of the Abolitionist Law Center.

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