

JUSTICE FOR JOSEPH 'JJ' MILLETT (Orleans County Case)

Note: I am focusing on the procedural shortcuts and the misapplication of the Domestic Terrorism statute. My mention of our family's 'difficult past' is to establish that I have seen this office's methods firsthand, and I am concerned about a pattern of over-charging rather than seeking medical solutions.

I have been drafting this for days, going over in my mind what matters and what doesn't. I've been hesitant to speak about my own personal experience with the law enforcement, State's Attorney's office, mental health advocates, women's advocates, public defense, and rehabilitation in Orleans County. I'm not saying it's all been bad; each time I've dealt with these departments has been an individual experience. I have witnessed good people in these positions doing good work more often than not.

However, there were times where major oversight on those departments' behalf was very harmful to me, my safety and my well being. That is my personal experience and if evidence of those failures is needed, I'm happy to provide it. That said, JJ is my cousin and a wonderful human being caught up in an injustice that is far greater than most of us will ever have to deal with. This is my letter written to the powers that be and to all of you:

Justice for JJ: A Veteran's Crisis is Not a Crime

To the Vermont Senate, the Professional Responsibility Board, and my fellow Vermonters,

I am writing this because I am deeply concerned about a situation unfolding right here in our community. My cousin, Joseph "JJ" Millett, is a veteran and a former corrections officer at Newport. He is a man who spent his life on the right side of the law, yet he is currently facing a charge of Domestic Terrorism. I have done my own research into this case and, having seen how our local system works first-hand, I am convinced that this is not a matter of public safety, but a medical emergency being treated like a criminal plot. In late February, JJ experienced a severe mental health breakdown. This was not a choice or a plan; it was a documented psychiatric crisis, and a psychotic episode likely triggered by a recent change in his VA medications. When things grew dark, JJ did exactly what a trained veteran was supposed to do: he reached out for help. He called a crisis line, voluntarily met with the police to explain his distress, and handed over his weapons to ensure everyone remained safe before letting himself be taken into custody. In those moments, JJ followed his natural physical instinct to do what was right, showing that his character remained intact even while his mind and his words were working against him. Now, State's Attorney Farzana Leyva is attempting to label that cry for help as "Terrorism." If we allow this to stand, we are sending a message to every veteran in Vermont that their emergency lifeline isn't a safe space, and that being honest about PTSD will earn them a jail cell instead of a doctor.

I know how Orleans County works. It is a tight-knit place where names carry a lot of weight. I have had my own personal run ins with this office where I was misidentified in a court proceeding, so I know how easily shortcuts are taken when the "reputation" of a family is involved. Because JJ comes from a family with a difficult history, it feels like the prosecution is looking at his last name instead of his medical records. In his time working at Northern State Correctional Facility, JJ wasn't just another employee; he was a

leader. In his career he was recognized as one of their most dedicated and reliable officers earning the respect of both his colleagues and the inmates he supervised for his calm handling of facility emergencies. All you have to do is research JJ's name and find evidence like the following, a federal court document from May 2023 (2:22-cv-00029-2) that references Correctional Officer Joseph Millett. In the document, he is noted for his quick, procedural response to an inmate in medical distress specifically calling a "10-25" (facility-wide assistance) and assisting an inmate who could not breathe.

They are even taking his private journals, which his own doctor(s) encouraged him to keep as a way to process his trauma, and trying to frame them as "terrorist plans." As someone that keeps her own journals based on doctors' medical advice, I would be hard pressed to share them with anyone that isn't a doctor, as journaling is used to process, heal and release past negative experiences. Those notes are raw emotions about traumatizing and scary incidents that we, as humans, use to break down all the hard, negative, "I would want to do harm to those who harmed me," thoughts in the safe space of our personal journals. These notes are a tool for healing where no actual harm or intent is being made, yet the State is treating a private clinical process as a criminal act. Those notes are not a blueprint of who JJ is, but a pressure release valve of who he doesn't want to be.

The law is very clear that a Domestic Terrorism charge requires specific intent, which means the person must have a clear mind and a goal to terrorize the public. JJ was in a medical fog, and his only goal was finding a safe environment, which he proved by choosing to call for help and to be arrested to prevent any potential harm. The law requires a "substantial step" (which the State's Attorney is most likely using the journal for) toward an attack, but JJ's only step was walking into a police station to surrender. He is not a terrorist. He is a soldier who is still trying to be a man of honor even while his mind is failing him.

We cannot let a "tough on crime" headline destroy a man who served our country. I am asking you to speak up and remind the State's Attorney's office that a medical crisis is not a national security threat. If this were the standard, the State's Attorney would have an overabundance of cases on the docket. Considering this office is already small and facing a massive case overload, it is an irresponsible use of resources to manufacture a "terrorism" case out of a medical emergency. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Sarah Romanowski