

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DRW Condemns Use of Restraints on Jacob Blake

As the Protection and Advocacy Agency for people with disabilities in Wisconsin, DRW was pleased to hear that as the result of public pressure, the Kenosha County Sheriff's Department no longer felt it necessary to subject Jacob Blake to further abuse by shackling him to his bed while hospitalized in critical condition after being shot by law enforcement. But the fact is, he never should have been shackled in the first place.

As a person with an apparent spinal cord injury, the last thing Jacob Blake needed was for law enforcement to require that he be restrained in his hospital bed. It is well documented that even purely medical restraints place patients at greater risk for functional decline, serious injury or death. Shackling a heavily sedated paralyzed person to a hospital bed based on a security policy makes little sense while it increases the risk of a fall or other movement that might further injure his spine.

The Kenosha County Sheriff's statement that it is their policy that all hospitalized detainees be restrained did not justify it. All persons with disabilities are entitled to reasonable accommodation of their disability. A person who cannot use his legs because of a spinal cord injury poses no flight risk, which is what the policy is designed to address. There was never any justification for applying this policy to Mr. Blake.

The law enforcement assault on Jacob Blake first and foremost is a racial justice issue. But it is becoming intertwined with a disability rights issue. Serious questions concerning systemic racism are raised by the police action that caused Mr. Blake's disability. The continued mistreatment of Mr. Blake under the guise of a Sheriff Department security policy may have made Mr. Blake's disability worse. DRW calls upon the Kenosha law enforcement authorities to respect Jacob Blake's rights as a person of color who now has a disability. Mr. Blake needs to be allowed to heal.

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Disability Rights Wisconsin is the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy system for the State of Wisconsin, charged with protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities and keeping individuals free from abuse and neglect.

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