

June 26, 2015

The Honorable Nikki R. Haley
Office of the Governor
1205 Pendleton Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

RE: Yakub Elshabazz #175837 Perry Correctional Institution, Pelzer, SC

Dear Governor Haley:

I'm writing you regarding an incident that occurred at Perry Correctional Institution on this afternoon. Yakub and I had been visiting for two and one-half hours before an officer approached our table asking him if he was okay and he told him he was. The officer questioned him twice more before the situation lead to our visit being suddenly terminated. I have explained in detail in the enclosure of what occurred this afternoon.

Our family understands the privilege of visitation and many do not have the opportunity to spend time with their incarcerated loved ones. Given the time of travel and distance from our home, these moments are treasured and we desire to spend every hour granted to us. I questioned the reasoning for the officer approaching our table after we'd been visiting with one another for so long and without incident, and the manner in which we were treated thereafter.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Sharon Gadsden
200 Kilbourne Rd. Apt A
Columbia, SC 29205
(803) 543-8472

Enclosure: Letter to SCDC Director

June 26, 2015

Office of Director
Bryan P. Stirling, Agency Director
South Carolina Department of Corrections
4444 Broad River Road
Columbia, SC 29210

RE: Visitation at Perry Correctional Institution with Yakub Elshabazz #175837

Dear Mr. Stirling:

On Friday, June 26, 2015 while visiting Perry Correctional in Pelzer, my visit with Yakub was suddenly ended. We had been visiting for much of the three-hour time period with no problems, at least that was the case until around 1730, Officer McCall approach our table, C-2, and asked Yakub if he was okay. He told him yes and asked Officer McCall what was wrong. He told Yakub he seem nervous and asked two additional times if he was okay. When he received the same response from him, Officer McCall left the table. Moments later about three officers entered the visitation room and one approached the table and told Yakub he need to come with them. I asked if everything was okay and did not receive a response. A few moments later Officer DeGeorgias approached me at the table and said our visit had been terminated. I asked him what was going on and he told me he could not provide me with that information. I explained that we'd been visiting without conflict for nearly two and one-half hours and all of a sudden this happens. I explained my concerns and he asked if we could step out in the hallway outside the visitation area. In the hall, Officeer DeGeorgias stated that per SCDC rules he could not give me any information about what was taking place. I informed him that I was aware of the policies and was concerned for my loved one and wish to find out as much as I could before leaving. I explained that we were conversing and enjoying visitation as those around us for over two hours. He then stated, "You seem nervous" and I told him I was upset by what's taking place and not receiving answers; he replied, "I've been working here 15 years and I know too, " (referring to SCDC policies) before ending the conversation and walking away. I asked another staff member as I was leaving who was the Duty Warden for the shift and they explained that Officer DeGeorgias was and if I needed any further assistance with what occurred this afternoon to call (843) 243-4700.

I am deeply concerned about what took place today and the lack of assistance I received from Officer DeGeorgias. I understand he has the authority to terminate the visit per SCDC policy:

“The Warden, Duty Warden, or an approved designee has the authority to terminate a visit while the visit is in progress if the inmate violates any established rules and regulations or if the inmate’s visitor(s) does not comply with the rules and regulations governing inmate visitors. Prior to termination of the visit, less severe alternatives may be attempted, if appropriate. This may include verbal warnings to the inmate and/or visitor(s) of improper conduct which, if not discontinued, will result in the visit being terminated and may result in the visitor's and the inmate's visiting privileges being suspended.”

Yet the manner in which the way we were treated was not professional nor with respect. I’m deeply disappointed in what occurred and wish for someone outside of Perry Correctional to review this incident.

Thank you for your assistance and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Sharon Gadsden
200 Kilbourne Rd. Apt A
Columbia, SC 29205
(803) 543-8472

cc: Honorable Nikki R. Haley, Governor’s Office
Bill Lindsey - Executive Director of NAMI