

# Authorities witch-hunt homeless families in Philadelphia and Trenton, New Jersey

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The criminalization of the poor and the brutality of the justice system in the US know virtually no limit.

On Friday, a 34-year-old woman was convicted of involuntary manslaughter for the death of her infant son in a Philadelphia homeless shelter in late 2010. Tanya Williams was sentenced to 9 to 18 years in prison. Williams is a single mother of five.

According to testimony, Williams had been living in the shelter system since the fall of 2010 after being forced out of her mother's home and then that of a church acquaintance just a month before giving birth to Quasir, the infant who died, and his twin brother, Quamir.

The woman's lawyer, Gregory Pagano, explained to the court that Williams was overwhelmed as she recovered from the premature birth of the twins, while caring for four other children in a homeless shelter.

Pagano commented, according to the *Philadelphia Daily News*, that "she was failed by the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, which discharged her too early after giving birth to the premature babies, by the city Department of Human Services, which provided inadequate services to her family, and by a social worker from Lutheran Children and Family Service, who reported that the twins were fine just 36 hours before the death."

The lawyer commented, "If they [the family service] didn't see it, how do we expect her to see it with an IQ of 65?" In fact, Lutheran Children has fired the social worker who last visited the family and pronounced the infant "healthy and well."

The prosecution pushed for the most savage conviction and sentence possible. Assistant District Attorney Peter Lim had asked the jury to convict Williams of premeditated first-degree murder. After she was convicted of manslaughter, Lim asked the judge to

sentence her to the maximum 22 to 44 years in prison, saying she showed "no accountability and no remorse" for nearly killing Quamir and for allowing Quasir to die in "the most painful way." Here is the voice of the well-fed and well-heeled speaking about people living in the social abyss.

In a heart-breaking statement to the court, Williams said, "I am sorry for what I have done. I have made a lot of mistakes in my life. I'm just asking for a second chance. I love my children more than I love myself. I love my children and would never do anything to hurt them." The court was predictably merciless.

In nearby Trenton, New Jersey, a mother was indicted with child endangerment June 27 after it was found that she and her two sons were living in a five-by-ten storage facility without heat or electricity. The woman, Sheena Johnson, 27, turned to sleeping in the unit after losing her source of employment last December and leaving an abusive fiancé.

During the winter months Johnson had been forced to scrape by for days at a time on couches of friends, family shelters, and charity hotels, until county assistance ran out. "It really hit me so hard, that I'm down at about the tree-root's-bottom, and what can I do to make my kids' life better this way... I didn't see any clarity—our only option was to stay where our stuff is," she told reporters. Johnson was released on \$50,000 bail, which was raised by various community organizations.

For the past several months, Johnson had kept her children in school, taking them to local fast food eateries for breakfast so they could dress and brush their teeth.

Despite the obvious difficulties the young mother faced, county officials were indifferent. "I just wished the mother would have sought help instead of going

down the route she took,” stated Ewing city Mayor Bert Steinmann, who added that the circumstance had “shocked and appalled” him.

A renter of a nearby storage unit said he believed Johnson had been living in the facility “for months” without heat or power, surrounded by trash bags full of belongings.



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