

Press Release

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Emergency Litigation Filed on behalf of Rashid Johnson, who has been on Hunger Strike for 41 days in Protest of VADOC's use of Solitary Confinement

[Richmond, VA] Today, Rights Behind Bars and the Krudys Law Firm filed emergency litigation on behalf of Kevin “Rashid” Johnson. Rashid Johnson is a writer, artist, and activist incarcerated by the state of Virginia. Through his writing he has [exposed abuses](#) within VADOC prisons. His writing and advocacy have led to intense and ongoing retaliation from VADOC officials.

In November 2023, Mr. Johnson was transferred to Red Onion State Prison. When he arrived at the prison, officials told Mr. Johnson that he would be put in solitary confinement unless he agreed to stop speaking out. Mr. Johnson refused. He was then placed in the “Restorative Housing Unit”—a euphemism for solitary confinement.

On December 26, 2023, Mr. Johnson and several others in solitary confinement at Red Onion began a hunger strike. The hunger strikers hoped to highlight the [continued and punitive use of solitary confinement](#) within the VADOC despite the Virginia General Assembly's recent [reform efforts](#).

Mr. Johnson organized and participated in this protest despite having health conditions which make the hunger strike particularly dangerous—Mr. Johnson suffers from cancer, high blood pressure, and chronic conditions related to a heart issue. VADOC officials immediately began a campaign to “break” Mr. Johnson's hunger strike by subjecting him to increasingly dangerous and inhumane conditions. They cut off the water to Mr. Johnson's cell, forcing him to lap water out of his uncleaned toilet. They housed him in an excessively cold cell. They deprived him of his hygiene supplies, prescription medications, and writing supplies. They prevented him from having showers or access to outdoor recreation and mobility. They did not allow him to communicate with his support system on the outside. Mr. Johnson has suffered severe dehydration that has required three emergency hospitalizations in the last month. He has now been on hunger strike for 41 days.

Mr. Johnson's condition remains extremely precarious. For his safety, it is essential that VADOC officials do not return Mr. Johnson to Red Onion State Prison. Red Onion is known for being violent and dangerous, and the staff there have demonstrated clear disregard for Mr. Johnson's life. Furthermore, a transfer to Red Onion or another prison in the Western part of the state will restrict Mr. Johnson's access to the medical care teams who are supervising his ongoing cancer treatment.

Mr. Johnson must be returned to general population at Sussex I State Prison, where he was incarcerated prior to November 2023, or to another prison in the Eastern or Central district of Virginia, and he must be allowed to continue the important work he has undertaken at great personal risk to himself throughout his incarceration: informing the public what atrocities the Virginia Department of Corrections is committing in the name of the people of Virginia.

Advocates have organized [campaigns](#) to [support Mr. Johnson](#) and the other hunger strikers.

This case was filed in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, case number 3:24-cv-00080. Read the [complaint](#).