

Temujin Kensu – a “Thorn in the Side” of the MDOC

It's clear why St. Clair County (and especially federal judge and former prosecutor Robert Cleland) wants to keep Temujin Kensu in prison. They hope to remain protected from the misconduct used to obtain a wrongful conviction as well as the embarrassment that would cause and the damage to their reputations if revealed. But why is the MDOC unsympathetic to Kensu?

In fact, Kensu has a good rapport with most on-the-floor MDOC officers because he resolves disputes all the time and he defends officers too when they are in the right. He actually protected and saved an officer decades ago during a riot. But to the MDOC administration he has been a “thorn in the side” from about the very beginning of his life sentence.

When Kensu was first sent to Jackson Prison in 1987, he spent about six months in the law library right away, committed to learning the rules and to fighting for justice, at first regarding his wrongful conviction. But then seeing all the abuses surrounding him, he started helping others. Along the way, he was befriended by “old-timers” and became part of what were known as “The Law Dogs” – the guys that would help others. And from then on, Kensu has always helped fellow prisoners with their legal problems free of charge. (*By the way, he has a standing invitation to work as a paralegal for a Southfield law firm once freed*).

In prison, he's not a “petty complainer” but has focused on inmates who can't afford counsel concerning the “big issues” – such as access to the courts, health care, abuse of prisoners, access to fundamental needs like healthy food and exercise. He has not even written a personal grievance in almost two years.

Of course, MDOC administrators have issues with Kensu because he has proven to be an excellent and successful “jailhouse lawyer”. In terms of prisoners' rights, he has won:

Kensu v. Haigh: (The right of confidentiality in legal correspondence with attorneys and right to have all forms of legitimate delivery of legal mail protected).

Kensu v. Cason: (The right to practice a legitimate religion of one's choice).

Kensu v. Buskirk: (The right to adequate medical care and to be free from cruel and unusual punishment).

Cain v. MDOC: (Right to due process and protection of property and assets; right to be free from retaliation)

Granda v. MDOC: (Right to be free from cruel and unusual punishment and right to adequate dental care).

Especially irritating to the MDOC is that Kensu won a \$325,000 federal lawsuit for lack of proper and adequate medical care that he was denied, despite his doctors' orders and recommendations.

The MDOC administration is not a fan of Kensu because his "lawyering" has forced them to make things right. He is presently litigating the atrocious diet for prisoners – one with little nutritional value that leads to diabetes, high blood pressure, etc., and, in turn, increased health care costs for the MDOC. Most dog food has as good, if not better, ingredients and vitamins than what inmates get. The diet, which used to be fairly nutritional, has gone downhill for years.

No organization likes to be told what they are doing needs to change. Kensu suffers criticism from the MDOC administration because he is a "thorn in the side" – a force for change, and a very effective one at that.

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