



People in Recovery Targeted for Exclusion from Opioid Discussion Organized by Prosecutors and Prevention Groups at Monmouth University

August 9, 2018 (West Long Branch) – A discussion on the opioid epidemic that was promoted as “open to the community” refused admittance to members of the affected population, including people with opioid use disorders and people in recovery. Members of the organization Help Not Handcuffs, Inc. were invited to attend the event and shared it on their social media page soliciting support from affected community members. The group encouraged the public to join the discussion and raise issues central to the opioid epidemic, notably the harms of drug prohibition and police impunity.

Upon arrival on campus members of the organization were immediately approached by Monmouth University’s Chief of Police William McElrath who stated, *“I was alerted to your presence here”* and began questioning them. The Community members told the chief that they were there to participate in the opioid discussion which drew the response *“it doesn’t matter, we need to know you’re coming.”* Jeana Sager who is a Graduate Student at the University contested the request to mandate an alert to the authorities for her attendance at public events.

The event was promoted as open to the public with no registration links, yet onsite organizers stated that no one could enter the event without pre-registering. *“We are over capacity so we cannot let anyone else in”*, stated one organizer. The organizers did say that if seats were left open, people would be let in. Many associated with Help Not Handcuffs, Inc. opted to wait only to be excluded, while other community members were allowed in without registration. Photos captured from inside the event showed half the seats were empty the entire time.

Brandon Chewey, who was not allowed to enter, stated *“As a Monmouth County resident who is recovering from an 11 year opiate use disorder and who has been targeted by law enforcement due to that health issue, I wanted to hear the plans of the prosecutors and the health professionals to address the epidemic. Instead of being allowed to be part of the discussion about solutions to an issue that has impacted my life for 16 years, I was locked out in a discriminatory manner.”*

Anna Green of Help Not Handcuffs, Inc. who sat with her boyfriend in empty seats only to be asked to leave stated *“When an event that’s supposed to be about preventing addiction bans and kicks out recovering people trying to tell those in power how to actually help us, you begin to realize that this is not really about helping people, but about continuing failed “recovery” methods and institutions, alongside mass incarceration which profit the leaders of this event and their friends.”*

Jeff King who was not allowed to enter, said “It is upsetting to be lied to in that way. I was told the room was at capacity and that was totally false. If the event is closed or private that is what they need to say.

The credibility of all the attendees and the host, Monmouth University has been tarnished. This crisis is serious and transparency is critical."

Chief McElrath continually approached Randy Thompson demanding to know "what are you doing?" Thompson replied that he was instructed to wait for an open seat to which Chief McElrath stated "I am not allowing you to wait." The Chief then singled Thompson out for removal from the building, during which time Thompson asked Monmouth County Prosecutor Christopher Grammiccioni (a key organizer of the event) why members of the non-profit were being kicked out which he ignored. The video can be seen here:

<https://www.facebook.com/randy.thompson.1694/videos/2359688194058318/UzpfSTM0Mjc5ODA5MjU0NzAyOToxMDI3NTIyNjc0MDc0NTY0/>

"It is clear we were targeted and they used numerous excuses to veil the fact that they wanted to keep us out and have a sterilized conversation about the opioid epidemic and avoid questions about the harm of anti-drug approaches and police impunity. When their excuses didn't hold up, they became more aggressive and removed us.... we were discriminated against." Thompson said.

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