

## Corrections officer Joseph Gomm, killed in Stillwater prison attack, remembered as 'kind soul'

**PP** [twincities.com/2018/07/19/mn-gomm-stillwater-killed-corrections-officer-remembered-for-kind-soul](https://www.twincities.com/2018/07/19/mn-gomm-stillwater-killed-corrections-officer-remembered-for-kind-soul)

By Mary Divine | [mdivine@pioneerpress.com](mailto:mdivine@pioneerpress.com) and Mara H. Gottfried | [mgottfried@pioneerpress.com](mailto:mgottfried@pioneerpress.com) | Pioneer Press July 19, 2018

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Officer Joseph Gomm was remembered Thursday by friends and family members for his "kind soul" and dedication to his job.

Gomm, a 16-year veteran of the Minnesota Department of Corrections, was killed Wednesday afternoon by an inmate at the Minnesota Correctional Facility — Stillwater.



Joseph Gomm (Courtesy of Officer Down Memorial Page, Inc., [www.odmp.org](http://www.odmp.org))

"Joe had one of the kindest souls, heart, and was dedicated to his job, life, and family," Gomm's brother, Anthony, told KSTP-TV.

Co-workers turned to social media to remember him and established a Go Fund Me site to help his family.

"He worked in my unit for years and made sure I got out safely to see my loved ones everyday," Theresa Herberg-Dunn wrote on Facebook. "I never let a day go by where I didn't thank him for that! ... Rest in Peace Joe and God bless your family!"

Thousands of members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, of which Gomm was a member, stood in silence for Gomm on Thursday during the international convention in Boston.

John Hillyard, president of the local AFSCME Council 5 Corrections Policy Committee, "asked everyone to hug the person next to them because you never know when it will be the last time," according to an AFSCME Council 5 Facebook post.

Neighbors at the Blaine mobile home community where Gomm lived since 2002 said Thursday he was fairly quiet and mostly kept to himself. He currently did not have anyone living with him.

Officials have not yet publicly released the name of the inmate suspected in the attack, but sources said he is Edward Muhammad Johnson.

Corrections Commissioner Tom Roy and Washington County Attorney Pete Orput will hold a press conference at 3 p.m. today to discuss the prosecution of Johnson.

Johnson allegedly attacked Gomm with a hammer at 1:30 p.m. Gomm was rushed to Regions Hospital in St. Paul, where he was pronounced dead.

## WHO IS EDWARD MUHAMMAD JOHNSON?

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Johnson, 42, is serving a 29-year sentence for the 2002 murder of his girlfriend, Brooke Elizabeth Thompson.

The son of two Chicago police officers, Johnson was 12 when he witnessed his father shoot his mother six times before turning the gun on himself.

Fourteen years after their murder-suicide, Johnson stabbed Thompson to death in his Bloomington apartment. Thompson's 5-year-old daughter was inside and heard the deadly assault from another room.

In a 2005 column in the Pioneer Press, Ruben Rosario wrote about Edward Muhammad and his 8-year old sister, Zakiyyah, witnessing the horrific execution of their mother, a granddaughter of the late Black Muslim leader Elijah Muhammad.

"The boy would later describe to a detective 'how his mother's head bounced with each shot,' veteran journalist Steve Bogira wrote in a 1989 Chicago Reader article on the murder-suicide," Rosario wrote. "The kids sought refuge at a neighbor's home. They were later taken in and raised by an aunt in the Twin Cities."

Zakiyyah Johnson said she was convinced that the childhood tragedy had a profound effect on her brother.

"You would have to ask him, but how could it not have?" she said. "It is like history happening again."

Edward Muhammad Johnson has been accused of assaulting someone guarding him before.

While in custody at the Hennepin County Public Safety Facility following his arrest in the death of his wife in 2002, Johnson punched a detention deputy in the eye. The deputy had instructed Johnson to stay away from an area within the facility, according to court documents. The deputy sustained a cut under his left eye. Johnson pleaded guilty to fourth-degree assault in the case and was sentenced to 13 months in prison.

## ATTACK IN PRISON'S INDUSTRY BUILDING

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Johnson was taken to the Minnesota Correctional Facility — Oak Park Heights after the attack and placed in segregation. As a precaution, all prisons in the Department of Corrections system were placed on lockdown after the attack.

Roy said he believes Gomm is the first corrections officer killed in the line of duty in Minnesota.

Gomm was working in the prison's industry building when he was attacked. The industry building houses areas for carpentry, welding and other work assignments for the inmates, Roy said.

Corrections officers are not armed with guns, but they do carry pepper spray and radios to call for assistance.

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

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The Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension is investigating. When the BCA completes its investigation, the case will be referred to the Washington County Attorney's Office, which will be responsible for filing any charges against Johnson.

Orput said Thursday that it could take several days for the case to be referred to his office. "It may take some time based on how much forensic analysis is required," he said.

Orput said he expected to meet with officers from the BCA and the Ramsey County Medical Examiner's office on Thursday afternoon.

"We aggressively prosecute all felonies, regardless of whether they are inside or outside the walls of the prison," Orput said. "On behalf of all corrections officers and the victims, we will be aggressively pursuing justice. We express our deepest condolences on behalf of the victim."

Orput said his office prosecutes about 20 inmates a year.

## PRISONS UNDERSTAFFED

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The Minnesota Department of Corrections-Stillwater houses 1,616 male inmates; 527 of them are incarcerated for homicide.

A recent analysis found the Department of Corrections was understaffed and needed to add about 150 officers systemwide, Roy said. He noted that a request to the Minnesota Legislature for a staffing increase went unfulfilled last session, but he added that it was not clear whether Gomm's death could be attributed to staffing levels.

Inadequate staffing at state correctional facilities is concern, according to AFSCME Council 5.

"We have lobbied the Legislature for increased staffing and funding to help alleviate these shortages only to have them voted down by politicians who do not support the safety and security of our correctional staff," officials with AFSCME Council 5 said in a statement. "We will continue to advocate for more staff to ensure the safety of our members and the public."

## RECENT PRISON ATTACKS NOTED

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Roy said "erratic behavior is not uncommon" among inmates, and that assaults on prison staff and on other inmates occur regularly.

A corrections officer at the prison was assaulted earlier this year.

The nearby Minnesota Correctional Facility-Oak Park Heights was placed on lockdown in June after an inmate attacked a corrections officer, causing serious injuries, officials said then. In March, assaults by inmates at the Minnesota Correctional Facility-Oak Park Heights sent 10 employees to the hospital — more injuries than in the previous five years combined.

## PRISON COMMUNITY MOURNS

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Officials with the Minnesota Corrections Association said Gomm's killing marked a "a difficult time for our community."

"We all recognize that there are risks associated with the work we do, yet we still do it because we are dedicated to making a difference for those we serve and for each other," the MCA said in a statement. "Regardless of what program or department we work for, and whether we work in the field or a correctional facility, we are all connected by our chosen profession. Our criminal justice colleagues have our support and admiration for the good work they do each and every day to keep us all safe."

MCA officials said they mourned Gomm's death.

"The minute we learned of this unprovoked attack on Officer Gomm our hearts sank," officials said in the statement. "We are greatly saddened by his death; we offer our deepest sympathy to Officer Gomm's family, friends and co-workers, who could not have prepared for their sudden loss. Words are inadequate at a time like this."

## A WAY TO HELP

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A Go Fund Me site has been established to help Gomm's family; donations can be made at [www.gofundme.com/officer-joe-gomm-fund](http://www.gofundme.com/officer-joe-gomm-fund).