

# Meek Mill's Key To Freedom Is Inside Philadelphia's Public 'Secret Corrupt Cops' List

We spoke to Meek's lawyer Joe Tacopina to answer burning questions.

Published March 7, 2018

Since his sentencing rocked social media back in November, many fans have climbed off of **Meek Mill's** roller-coaster ride of a court case—one that **threatens to lock him away** in an eight-by-nine prison cell until 2021.

Developments spinning both in and out of his favor are plenty: several articles of presiding judge **Genece Brinkley's** dirty laundry have been aired out, revealing a stench of **personal biases** against Meek. Less than a month later, fingers were crossed tightly for a bail request on his behalf. Judge Brinkley **turned him away**, citing Meek as a “flight risk” and “danger” to the very community that rallied by the hundreds and turned up over 300,000 signatures demanding his release.

More lawlessness from the courts was unveiled when **Wanda Chavarria**, Brinkley's appointed court clerk, was dismissed from duty after **slipping the Philly rap star a note** pleading that he pay her son's tuition. After more protests, petitions and pressure on the entire Philadelphia Common Court of Common Pleas, there is still no promise of freedom nor justice for 30-year-old Robert Rihmeek Williams. But, the latest discovery by lawyer **Joe Tacopina** and the rest of Meek's defense team places faith back within reach: a “secret corrupt cops list,” featuring the name of Meek's 2008 arresting and testifying officer **Reginald Graham**.

Confidentially withheld from Meek's defense team, the collection of names represent officers with a storied history of perjury, excessive force, and other forms of misconduct blemishing their policing careers and tarnishing the legitimacy of their testimonies. Newly appointed district attorney **Larry Krasner** has now adjusted its classified status after **publicly releasing the full list via *The Inquirer***. Up to 29 police officers have gone from the witness stand to the hot seat on the dually titled “Do Not Call” list with recorded behavior of even the most

grotesque kind, such as sexual abuse of children, prostitution solicitation and excessive force.

Along with 28 other officers, now-former Officer Graham's placement on the list has swung the floodgates open for the 2008 and current incarceration of Meek Mill, and other cases of Philadelphia convicts, and could bring the city's criminal justice system down to its knees once and for all.

BET Digital spoke with Tacopina, who leads Meek's defense, to sift through the legal jargon, update Meek's status and get down to the point: does this mean Meek will be released or not?

**BET Digital: Can you explain the implications that Meek's arresting and testifying officer landing on a "secret corrupt cops list" has on his case in 2018?**

**Joe:** It makes the underlying case, for which he was wrongly given 2-4 years for a probation violation, a no criminal offense, rotten to the core. We uncovered this shocking evidence concerning the circumstances surrounding his original arrest. Meek has all along proclaimed his innocence regarding possessing any drugs and pointing a gun at any officers. You can see by the arrest photos that he was beaten to a pulp: one of his braids were pulled out, his eye was swollen shut, his jaw was dislodged. He was beaten by these officers, in particular Officer Graham, who has had a history of excessive force and assault of defendants. We've uncovered seven other complaints— internal affairs complaints— about his conduct upon arrest. But what's most disturbing is that we've uncovered this list kept secret by the prior district attorney Seth Williams (who is now in federal prison by the way) of police officers whose testimonies cannot be used without special permission, given their unreliability. This means they have the propensity to lie about the circumstances of the arrest. The district attorney said these officers cannot be called to the stand because [the courts] would be supporting perjury and their lack of credibility could become uncovered, which would then render many other convictions.

**What are the immediate requests you have for the courts based on this?**

**Joe:** Because of that, we filed the petition to have his recent conviction overturned. And most importantly, to have him released on bail while his application is being considered by the court. Other defendants, as we now have at least four others, have filed for similar relief based on the existence of that list, citing violations of

their rights. They're also seeking to have their convictions overturned. We've read reports that 800 of those cases have either been dismissed or otherwise because the officers on this list were the arresting officers.

We were never informed that Officer Graham was on this list, and he's the only officer who testified on Meek's case. We've maintained all along that he's lied and not been credible.

**There has to be some sort of federal statute against that, though.**

**Joe:** I was a former prosecutor. You are not allowed to hide a weakness in your case from the defense. You're not allowed to hide the fact that the arresting officer may be a liar, or may be someone who has committed perjury before, or may be someone who has falsified arrest documents. You can't hide that from the defense to gain a tactical advantage. This is not a football game where you get to huddle and hide secrets. If information like that is available to the prosecutor, he has to reveal that to the defense. This is about seeking justice, not seeking a win.

Obviously, the district attorney had no consideration for justice at all because he was looking to win cases by hiding this. Maybe that's one of the reasons he's in federal prison today because he didn't follow the law or the rules. Certainly this is very troubling and is a fundamental violation of what our criminal justice system is supposed to be about.

**In his 2007 arrest, Meek was beaten to a pulp and hospitalized by Officer Graham, and Meek has showed that to the world. How has he been able to evade a police brutality charge from this case?**

**Joe:** Unfortunately, there's this sometimes unwritten code among police officers where they protect each other. Really, that's what happened [in the 2008 case]. Meek and his family complained about the brutality that he suffered. He was beaten for no reason. He was put into handcuffs, taken inside the house, and beaten right there in the home. They complained about that during the original arrest. Internal affairs investigated, and it was pushed to the side. That's how he evaded responsibility and prosecution. No one took it seriously.

Meek Mill also was not Meek Mill at the time. He wasn't a superstar yet. He was a black kid who got the hell beat out of him, and [his family] complained about it. But they didn't have a voice, and no one heard them. That's sort of what happened. It's very disturbing. I'm sure Meek is not the only one. As a matter of fact, we

found seven other instances of other individuals who have made complaints that they were wrongly beaten upon arrest by Officer Graham.

**In addition to the discovery of Graham’s name on the “secret corrupt cops” list, is pursuing a civil lawsuit against him on Meek’s behalf worth it, or are you only focused on Meek’s defense amid the current litigation right now?**

**Joe:** The focus is solely on injustice in the criminal justice system. A civil lawsuit against some unemployed ex-cop is not really— well, a civil lawsuit against the district attorney’s office or the police department is something different. This is not about money, this is about justice. Obviously, we’re pursuing all alternatives and a civil lawsuit is certainly not out of the realm of possibility. If we have to go that route, we will. But, in priority order, we’d first like the justice system, the law enforcement agencies, and the courts to handle this properly, and do what is right first and foremost. Once that’s done, then we’ll think about pursuing other civil remedies that Meek may have. The most important thing here is the penal ramifications and the criminal justice violations that have occurred in this case.

**Judge Brinkley has been accused of several unethical practices, including exercising personal biases in her treatment and sentencing of Meek. Talk to me about how that has or will directly impact Meek’s release.**

**Joe:** There’s two categories of her improper conduct: one that directly relates to Meek in this case, and then others that have occurred outside of Meek’s case that would show she is unethically abusing her position as a judge. The category relating to Meek’s case includes things like her making a personal request in front of Meek and **Nicki Minaj** (Meek’s then-girlfriend) in chambers, off the record and without his attorney nor a court reporter present, regarding the remaking of the **Boyz II Men** song where she asked him to include her by giving her a shout-out on it. He thought it was a joke, and he and Nicki laughed about it. She said it was serious, and he told her that he couldn’t do that. And she said, ‘Well, go suit yourself then.’ Then, she later gives him two to four years when both the district attorney and the probation officer asked for zero time. They said that it was technical violation and he didn’t commit a crime. So, why would he get two to four years on a technical violation? Both the prosecutor and probation officer said of course not, and she even attacked them for not asking for jail time, then gave him two to four years. Is that a result of her being insulted or feeling jilted by a personal request that was inappropriate for her to make? I don’t know.

After she appoints a personal choice as a probation officer, Officer Underwood, into this case, someone who is friends with **Charlie Mack** (Meek's former manager), and then have this probation officer repeatedly on the record asking Meek to fire Roc Nation and bring Mack back in, I should sit by silently? And then as the district attorney and probation officer said, we're following your wishes, Your Honor? No, that's inappropriate. The judge is not supposed to personally pick the probation officer for a defendant. The probation officer gets assigned by probation, not by the judge.

Then, she shows up at a community service he was doing as a term of his probation while he was supposed to be at a homeless shelter. She showed up there, even though she was out on sick leave at the time, and watched Meek as he worked the shelter. She also spoke to him about the job he was doing, and complaining that he wasn't doing what he was supposed to-- speaking to him one on one without counsel present. It just shows you her level of interest in him and her absolutely above-board, unusual *personal* interest in Meek. That's what probation officers are for, and they don't even do that. But, the fact that she actually went there by herself while she was supposedly bedridden, and then began a conversation with him is totally improper, inappropriate and unprofessional. But she did it. And that's just some of the things she did.

Then, there's her clerk who handed Meek a note during one of his court appearances asking him right in front of Judge Brinkley to pay for her son's college education. Stuff just happens in her court that doesn't happen anywhere else in the world. It's repeated and continual.

**It seems that nearly every person who had a hand in the results of Meek's current incarceration has, one way or another, been tied to some form of misconduct. That, alone, should be strong enough to grant him an immediate release. Why isn't it?**

**Joe:** That's a damn good question. What's the harm in getting him out on bail when he's already served about four months. He's missed Thanksgiving and Christmas with his family. He's not going anywhere. He's not a flight-risk. The guy is one of the most popular entertainers in the world. Why does he have to stay in jail where he's nearing the minimum portion of his sentence every single day. For something that maybe overturned? When there's corruption on the police level and on the arresting officer level? When you have wrongdoing on the judge's clerk? When you have the judge committing improper acts--including using her clerk on her

personal time; that's another fact. She acts improper even in matter unrelated to Meek, which is important because it proves that she is prone to act improperly. So when you have that, across the board from the arresting officer, to the judge, to the clerk, how is he not on bail while this all gets sorted out? You have a new DA in now, who seems to be above board in every way, someone who's run on a platform of anti-corruption and is supposedly an honorable, ethical man. The DA's office never even sought incarceration for Meek. They didn't oppose our bail request, which is unbelievable. But, again, he's still in jail and I don't know the answer to that question. It's frustrating, and these are terrible injustices.

It's not even just Meek. Meek himself is not only concerned about his case, but the other people who have been wrongly incarcerated based off of the conduct of these officers. Aside from Meek's case, we're hopeful that this newly-discovered evidence will result in immediate release from prison of all people convicted based off of the wrongful conduct or testimony of the officers at issue. Meek has a voice and people behind him. Most of those people don't, and that's what's troubling.

**In words that someone totally unfamiliar with the justice system would understand, can you explain what a Post-Conviction Relief Act (PCRA) is?**

**Joe:** It's a petition to the common pleas for release under the Pennsylvania rules of criminal procedure. The PCRA is based on evidence discovered after the conviction for reconsideration, and for the conviction to be set aside. That's what you're seeing here across the board and why you see all of these filings. It is a petition under the Post-Conviction Relief Act to show that the conviction was wrongfully obtained.

**Why is this the best option for Meek's case?**

**Joe:** It's an important option because we and the DA and the probation department believe a 2-4 year sentence was completely inappropriate and was based on a judge's bias. It should be set aside because of her conduct in this case. You have something new and very powerful, which is that the underlying conviction that put him on this probation, allowed the extension of this probation and allowed a judge to jail him based on a technical violation instead of a crime, renders the entire situation rotten. Aside from what she has or hasn't done, you have the fact that Meek never should have been on probation to begin with, and certainly not this long. There never should have been a conviction to begin with. You have an officer who lied and who was on a list of officers who had a propensity for lying,

dishonesty, and falsifying arrests documents. This knowledge that the DA was never turned over to Meek nor his attorneys. Ever.

**Since you last spoke to him, how is he handling life in prison?**

**Joe:** He's obviously disheartened by how he's been treated by the justice system. It has really been completely unfair to him. This new information we've uncovered about the police officers and the corruption is not something he's surprised by because he knew that they were lying. He said all along that he hadn't done the things. He'd said all along that he was beaten while in handcuffs. None of this is a shock to him.

It's tough for him right now. He's in an 8x9 cell, the food there isn't exactly what you would call edible by human standards. But he's a positive person with a strong mental outlook. He's encouraged by the support he gets everyday not only from the other celebrities and people with big names, but just by fans, people who are writing him letters, and other inmates who are rallying behind him. He's strong, and he's handling this as well as can be expected.

**Back in November, you all were fighting to remove him from solitary confinement, and were successful. Talk about what led to the court's decision to place him there and how you knew this would be detrimental for Meek.**

**Joe:** That was definitely the court's decision. I don't have any other answers than what we believe regarding Judge Brinkley's personal feelings toward him. You can't justify that with any legal analysis. I don't know. Just the notion of him being in solitary confinement over a technical violation is just another outrageous fact in this case. It's just one of many. It's getting to the point now where you just have to compartmentalize and hope that this nightmare ends soon. We believe it will.

**There was also news that he was making 19 cents an hour in prison for several different jobs, which I believe is more than the average prisoner earns. What would you say to people who argue that even behind bars, Meek is privileged by his celebrity?**

Anyone who says Meek is privileged is living in a bubble. Meek is living in an 8-by-9-foot cell. He is eating food that most human beings would not consider edible. He has no contact with his child. So, to determine privilege from Meek's current living status is a joke. He gets no special privilege from inside of the prison, that's for sure. He doesn't expect any, might I add.

**Mr. Tacopina, you are representing a Black man whose current incarceration spoke not only to discrepancies within the justice system, but broadened the conversation on the mass incarceration of Black citizens. What does that mean to you?**

**Joe:** It means a lot to me. As Martin Luther King Jr. once said, 'injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.' I've spent my life dedicated to this system fighting injustices. Meek has a voice and the ability to fight. Many young, Black men in jail do not have that voice and ability, knowing that the cops who were on that list were lying. But, they can't get their voice out and cannot be heard. That's how I take this representation on. It's something that is an awesome and daunting responsibility. Meek also feels that he has a responsibility. And every time I meet with Meek, we spend time talking about his case, but he then goes on to talk about other people who don't have the ability to fight like he is. He hopes that he has an impact on him. Our discovery of this list has already led to four other defendants who are represented by the public defender's office to piggyback off of that list and file additional motions under the PRCA. If Meek and his case can help others, this makes it all worth it.

**If the PCRA turns out successful, are there any other loose legal ends that could reel him back into another potential jail sentence?**

**Joe:** No. His probation officer has even said he's been a model probationer. So, no, there are no other legal troubles and we don't expect any. He's been exactly who you want to be as a person on probation: you want to be rehabilitated, and turn out more positive and productive. Since Meek was an 18-year-old kid whose father was killed when he was 5 years old on the same street he was arrested on, he's turned his life around to make himself an enormous success. He's given back to the community, and is an example of what you want young people and people on probation to strive to be. You want them to rehabilitate and do what he's done. So, we shouldn't discourage that by doing what they have done to him.

Written by Diamond Alexis

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