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Kenneway family hit out after cell death

by evan short

The heartbroken family of John Kenneway have released a statement to the Andersonstown News accusing the prison authorities of "breaking" their father.

On Friday the former republican was found dead in his cell at Maghaberry where he was being held after having his licence revoked in February. The 45-year-old was one of three men convicted of killing LVF leader Billy Wright in Long Kesh in 1997. But his family have revealed that he severed all links with his former republican colleagues in 2000. The grandfather was being held in the punishment blocks on 23-hour lock-up when he was found dead on Friday evening.

An investigation into his death is now being conducted, but in the statement released to the Andersonstown News his family have said he was targeted by prison staff in a catalogue of abusive behaviour that they say finally wore him down.

Mental abuse

"Our daddy, John Kenneway, took his own life on Friday 8 June while in the custody of the Prison Service," the statement reads. "He had been on 23-hour lock up for 18 weeks. During this time he suffered constant harassment and mental abuse.

"When he first arrived in jail it was three and a half weeks before they let him wash and change into clothes that were left in on his second day.

"He was constantly threatened, strip-searched and wakened by banging on his cell door at five in the morning.

"He was on medication before he went in, yet he was refused a doctor's visit for at least 10 weeks. When he did get one he was only given sleeping tablets, prescribed to him for two nights."

"They held back his food a few times and spat in it and his water. They took from him his television and PlayStation, which he paid for, without refunds.

"The only things he had to look forward to were his visits and phonecalls with us. On a few occasions they decided he could not use his phone.

"They used pathetic excuses to disrupt his visits on a number of occasions. There was no such thing as human rights for our dad, and they knew he couldn't do anything about it. It was his word against theirs.

"Last week they told him they would break him. Well, they did, but they also broke us – his family.

"He wasn't just 'Billy Wright's killer,' he was our daddy and a grandfather.



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He loved his kids and grandkids, we were what he lived for which is why he broke all ties with the republican movement when he got out in 2000. "This is why we ask for the press to stay away from the funeral. It is a non-political, non-paramilitary, family funeral."

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