

A Pattern of Deception by Cascade County Sheriff Jesse Slaughter

The Erosion of Justice in Cascade County

Op-Ed By Jesse Wagner

The thin veneer of “constitutional” leadership in Cascade County is peeling away to reveal a record defined by sworn falsehoods, staggering taxpayer-funded settlements, and a systemic failure to uphold the rule of law. While Sheriff Jesse Slaughter publicly champions himself as a “constitutional sheriff,” the official record suggests a pattern of behavior that directly undermines the U.S. and Montana Constitutions.

The clearest evidence of this disconnect emerged during a June 2024 coroner’s inquest into the death of Michael Hansen. Under oath, Sheriff Slaughter testified there was “absolutely no unlawful activity” by his office, yet Montana statute tells a different story. Montana Code Annotated § 46-5-227 explicitly requires officers to exhibit an original search warrant to occupants upon request. During the encounter, Detective Jacob Try—who later received a national award based on a nomination filled with inaccuracies—refused Hansen’s repeated demands to see a warrant, ordered him off his own property, and jumped the fence without presenting any paperwork. While the investigation was reportedly centered on



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the purchase of cat food for another individual, it escalated to a fatal shooting where independent audio analysis indicates Detective Try fired first and then again before the victim got off a single shot. Furthermore, a 9mm casing was later discovered at the scene

despite official claims that all evidence had been collected.

These local failures are underscored by a grim statewide record of excessive force and a lack of oversight. From 2013 to 2023, Montana law enforcement recorded 72 killings, a deadly-force rate higher than 86% of all other states, or 2.1 killings per 10,000 arrests. Alarming, 39% of those killed statewide did not have a gun. Montana’s accountability score remains among the lowest in the nation; only about 14% of civil complaints against officers are ruled in favor of civilians. Cascade County operates squarely within this environment of “lawfare,” where overly cozy relationships between law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges often protect the system instead of the people, contributing to Montana ranking near the top nationally for wrongful convictions per capita.

Nowhere is the cost of this unaccountable leadership more visible than inside the Cascade County Detention Center, the facility Slaughter

directly oversees. It has become a focal point for preventable tragedy, resulting in \$750,000 in taxpayer-funded wrongful-death settlements alone. This includes a \$550,000 settlement for the 2021 suicide of Michael Lee Alexander, Jr., and a \$200,000 settlement for the 2022 suicide of Aleesha Mae Kempa. The crisis has only accelerated, with three inmates dying within a single two-week period in the summer of 2024—two by suicide and one by overdose. Meanwhile, the department’s internal culture has faced its own scrutiny, with multiple detention officers arrested in 2025 on felony assault, domestic violence, and DUI charges.

True constitutional leadership requires transparency and the willingness to submit to the same scrutiny applied to the public. Most states require polygraph screening for law enforcement precisely because courts rely so heavily on officer testimony. While Slaughter’s department uses polygraphs on suspects when convenient, he has refused the same standard for himself. An independent polygraph examination by a neutral expert could clarify disputed statements regarding jail conditions, the Hansen incident, and the Sheriff’s own sworn testimony. As advocates appeal for a citizens’ grand jury through the federal courts, the demand for genuine reform grows louder. Cascade County deserves leadership that upholds civil rights and due process rather than undermining them through falsehoods and systemic failures. 🇺🇸