



montana  
HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK

April 19, 2021

Director Brian Gootkin  
Montana Department of Corrections  
PO Box 201301  
Helena, MT 59620-1301

Sent via email to: [Brian.Gootkin@mt.gov](mailto:Brian.Gootkin@mt.gov)

Dear Director Gootkin,

I'm writing to provide some troubling information about a Department of Corrections employee working at the Montana State Prison. It has recently come to our attention that Kelly Chambers, the employee, is a white nationalist actively participating in a racist version of Odinism called "Wotanism." Wotanism was created by [David Lane](#), a member of the domestic terrorist and white nationalist organization called "The Order," which robbed banks, bombed a Boise synagogue, and hoped to jumpstart a race war in the 1980s. Lane died in prison while serving a sentence for his role in The Order's assassination of a Jewish radio host.

We wanted to provide the following information, because we know how seriously you take the threats posed by white nationalists to our communities. Back in 2017, you and I both spoke at public rallies in Bozeman denouncing antisemitic and racist fliers that were distributed in the area. While you were the Gallatin County Sheriff, we appreciated how responsive you and your department were when responding to manifestations of white nationalism. You clearly understand what's at stake if white nationalism is allowed to gain footholds in our communities, or, in this case, Montana's prison system.

Kelly Chambers recently hosted a Wotanism ceremony at his home in Butte, where at least one attendee sported a swastika tattoo. The *Montana Standard* ran a [photo](#) of the ceremony being led by Ron McVan. With David Lane behind bars, McVan played a significant role in both creating and spreading Wotanism. McVan wrote guidebooks for ceremonies and rites of passage that laid out how to practice this racist religion. McVan believes that Wotanism will serve as the catalyst to create the "Aryan super race." McVan worked with Lane's wife to spread their racist beliefs across the United States and to white nationalists in Europe, Russia, Australia, South Africa, and Latin America.

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McVan has also spread Wotanism into the prison system through an extensive outreach program. Historian Mattias Gardell, in his book on racist neo-pagans, stated that Wotanism is the most prominent of these racist religions in prisons, and that 20% of its followers are incarcerated. Wotanism leaders helped create the National Kindred Prison Alliance and donate literature, videos, and ceremonial artifacts to help their prison-bound adherents keep following the racist religion. Given Wotanism's basis in white nationalism and its focus on prison recruitment, it's incredibly troubling that Kelly Chambers sponsored the event in Butte.

Wotanism is deeply rooted in white nationalism, which makes sense given McVan's involvement. Prior to connecting with Lane, McVan worked at the headquarters of the Church of the Creator (now known as [The Creativity Movement](#)), edited its *Racial Loyalty* newsletter, and did various graphic design projects. The Creativity Movement has a history of activists engaging in violence directed at people of color and others the group views as its enemies. An integral part of Creativity doctrine is RAHOWA, an acronym standing for "Racial Holy War." It's used to describe a worldwide ethnic cleansing that will leave white people as Earth's only inhabitants. If you're interested in more information about McVan, we encourage you to read [the profile](#) we published about him in 2019.

The dangers posed by racist neo-pagans is clear. For example, racist Odinists participated in the infamous Charlottesville Rally in 2017 which resulted in the killing of an anti-racist activist. Anders Breivik, the 2011 mass shooter in Norway who killed 77 people, also followed racist Odinism. However, it's important to recognize that [not all followers](#) of Odinism, Asatru, and other neo-pagan religions are white nationalists. In fact, many followers of neo-pagan religions vehemently denounce McVan and others who have co-opted and perverted neo-pagan beliefs with white nationalism and antisemitism.

The connection between McVan and Chambers is clear. McVan thanked Kelly Chambers on Facebook for hosting the Wotanism ceremony in Butte. Chambers has referred to McVan as a "wise, kind hearted man," while also passing along messages from him in social media posts. We've also noticed that a few of Chambers' tattoos are sometimes used by white nationalists. We confirmed with the Department of Correction's Human Resources Bureau at the end of March that Chambers does work at the Montana State Prison.

Clearly, having a white nationalist serving as an officer at the Montana State Prison is problematic on many levels. It raises many questions, not the least of which include:

- How might Chambers' white nationalist views be influencing his interactions with inmates of color, which data show are disproportionately overrepresented in Montana prisons, especially given his position of power in those interactions?
- Given McVan's extensive efforts to get his materials into prisons over the years, is Chambers helping McVan spread his racist religion within the prison?
- Is Chambers providing special treatment to inmates who express white nationalist views, either those echoing his racist religious beliefs or those belonging to groups like the Aryan Brotherhood, European Kindred, Aryan Circle, or similar groups that are active in prisons?

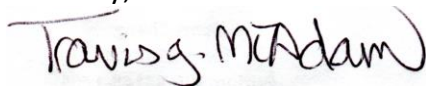
We also find it concerning that, according to social media posts, it appears that Chambers has participated in events to recruit new employees for the prison.

Most people readily equate racism with a swastika or a person in a Klan robe. One of the challenges posed by McVan and other practitioners of racist neo-pagan beliefs is that they deploy symbols that are less obvious in their racism. Instead of just swastikas, McVan and his supporters are just as likely to use the Norse Sun Wheel, Life Rune, Thor's Hammer, or something similar. These more subtle forms of imagery allow them to avoid public criticism and open new lines of recruitment. While the symbols may change, the underlying racism and antisemitism stay the same.

We see Chambers playing a similar game. He has repeatedly claimed he's not a white supremacist, which is a common tactic used by white nationalists who often frame their beliefs in benign-sounding ways, such as claiming they're only celebrating their white heritage. Chambers also has characterized McVan as one of the "leading authorities on Odinism in the area." While there are many followers of neo-pagan religions who aren't white nationalists, the followers of McVan's Wotanism can't credibly make that claim. McVan may live on the Butte Hill, but his ideas, writings, and artwork continue to inspire white nationalists around the world. Chambers seems to be one of those radicalized by Wotanism.

Having a McVan follower like Kelly Chambers working in the state prison is highly problematic, and we're sure the Department of Corrections will want to address it. Following the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, the [armed forces](#) and [law enforcement](#) are trying to deal with the problem of having members who are white nationalists and/or militia supporters. We hope your department can be a leader in this ongoing national conversation. We would appreciate a response to this letter, including information about any steps the Department of Corrections may decide to take.

Sincerely,



Travis McAdam

*Program Director:*

*Combating White Nationalism & Defending Democracy*

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