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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2012/11/05/mentally-ill-man-dies-injured-and-alone-in-a-tulsa-jail-cell/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | November 5, 2012



In a horrific story out of Oklahoma, lawyers representing the estate of a prisoner who was found dead in the Tulsa Jail have sued the local sheriff's office and the jail's private health care provider. In a motion just filed in federal court, attorneys have asked a judge to release a video made of the man's final two days, during which he allegedly languished in an isolation cell without food, water, or medical attention.

As reported by the [Tulsa World](#):

Elliott Earl Williams, 37, was pronounced dead in his cell at 11:21 a.m. Oct. 27, 2011, after allegedly going days without food and water.

According to the motion seeking release of the video and related documents, Williams, who had exhibited signs of mental illness, tried to hurt himself and ran into a steel door head-first after being placed in a booking cell upon arrival at the jail Oct. 22.

When detention officers and medical personnel refused to treat him, claiming he was faking paralysis, he was left on the floor of the booking cell for 10 hours and soiled himself, the motion states.

He was then transferred by gurney to the jail's medical unit, where he was dumped in a shower and left for two hours. He was then moved to a medical unit cell, where he was left naked on a steel bunk with only a blanket, the motion states.

Williams remained in the cell, naked, immobile and with only a blanket, for the next three days, according to the motion.

He last ate on the morning of Oct. 23 and last drank any water other than a few drops he managed to lick off his finger on the morning of Oct. 24, according to documents cited in the motion.

The next morning, on Oct. 25, Williams was dragged on his blanket to a video-monitored cell, according to the motion. The remaining 51 hours of Williams' life were videotaped.

Included on that tape, according to the motion, are numerous instances in which detention officers opened Williams' cell door and threw Styrofoam food containers onto the floor of the cell.

On Oct. 26, the day before his death, no one entered his cell, according to the motion.

On one occasion, he attempted to open one of the food containers that had been thrown into his cell the previous day, but his efforts to do so failed, the motion states. In the process of trying to open the food container, he spilled the cup of water. The empty cup was still in the

cell when Mr. Williams died.

Just after 8 a.m. Oct. 27, a doctor and a jail nurse found that Williams had little, if any, reflex in his feet. Vomit and saliva had pooled on Williams face, but he was provided no additional medical care, according to the motion.

Three hours later, detention officers entered Williams cell and found him not breathing and without a pulse.

As a final demonstration of the complete lack of human respect shown Mr. Williams throughout his jail stay, two of the nurses took a corner of Mr. Williams blanket, lifting and pulling on it until Mr. Williams dead body was sent sprawling across the floor, the motion states.

The State Medical Examiners Office found that Williams died from complications of vertebrospinal injuries due to blunt force trauma and also found a pattern of dehydration, the motion states.

The lawsuit, which claims that Williams civil rights were violated, is reportedly one of several filed by the attorneys alleging inadequate care and supervision in the jails medical unit. Health care in that unit and throughout the Tulsa Jail are provided by a private company called Correctional Health Care Management. Lawyers say that if the judge releases the video and other documents, they can show a pattern of indifference and neglect toward inmates on the part of the Sheriffs Office and the jails health-care provider dating back to 2007.

In Williams case, it was clear by the time he reached the jail that he was seriously mentally ill. Police who arrested him for breaking things at a local Marriott Hotel wrote in the arrest report: It was readily apparent that the suspect was having a mental breakdown. The suspect was rambling on about God, eating dirt. According to the *Tulsa World*, At one point, Williams stated that he was going to kill himself that night and asked police to shoot me twice, the arrest report states. After officers repeatedly asked Williams to sit down, he said to them, What do I have to do to get you to shoot me? and began to approach one of them. Police then used pepper spray to subdue him.

Williams was arrested on a charge of obstructing/interfering with an officer and taken to the Tulsa Jail. What happened to him once he arrived there is a particularly awful example of what can happen to people with untreated mental illness once they enter the criminal justice system.

(h/t to [Prison Legal News](#) for alerting us to this story.)

James Ridgeway (1936-2021) was the founder and co-director of Solitary Watch. An investigative journalist for over 60 years, he served as Washington Correspondent for the Village Voice and Mother Jones, reporting domestically on subjects ranging from electoral politics to corporate malfeasance to the rise of the racist far-right, and abroad from Central America, Northern Ireland, Eastern Europe, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia. Earlier, he wrote for The New Republic and Ramparts, and his work appeared in dozens of other publications. He was the co-director of two films and author of 20 books, including a forthcoming posthumous edition of his groundbreaking 1991 work on the far right, *Blood in the Face*. Jean Casella is the director of Solitary Watch. She has also published work in The Guardian, The Nation, and Mother Jones, and is co-editor of the book *Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement*. She has received a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship. She tweets @solitarywatch.

Accurate information and authentic storytelling can serve as powerful antidotes to ignorance and injustice. We have helped generate public awareness, mainstream media attention, and informed policymaking on what was once an invisible domestic human rights crisis.

Only with your support can we continue this groundbreaking work, shining light into the darkest corners of the U.S. criminal punishment system.

by [Juan Moreno Haines](#)

October 25, 2022

by [Solitary Watch Guest Author](#)

October 13, 2022

by [Vaidya Gullapalli](#)

September 29, 2022

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Reading article was one thing, but the video, made my stomach hurt and my soul ache. All I kept thinking, someone is going to walk in and save him. Should those people go to jail? I say no, now listen I'm not a huge fan of violence, but in this case, everyone of them should have to watch their child, children, or parent suffer the way that this man did, no life should be treated with such disdain, hatred, and like everyone else lack compassion and humanity.

obstructing/interfering with an officer Can mean anything, can't it. I don't like the way you looked at me, so you're under arrest. There doesn't have to be any proof.

I would just like to know,

Where is the compassion for this man? So what if he had a mental issue, or he broke something in a motel? I know this happened almost 4 yrs ago. Still it never shouldve happened, they as police officers are suppose to serve and protect

The inhuman way of the police DIDNT SERVE OR PROTECT in any way.

If this was a question of his color, let me ask you this?

What color did you ask to be born?

One day my friends, this stuff is going to cause America a lot of problems.if they cant monitor prisoners they cant monitor the budget.

I just want to know how people think a few cheap things at a hotel are worth more than a mans life, regardless of mental state.

I seriously want to see the faces of the hooligans and inhuman people that did this to this beautiful heart. I wonder how people, in this world today, would do such a thing and think they will go unnoticed? Did they think about their future because doom is beginning to fall on them ?? So very sad but i pray for the innocent life lost due to this.

the jail facility should be shut down at this monent the guards should be charged with a crime..and the insurance company should have millions and millions locked down for a judgement in the future..they should be put out of business now.

I find a wealth of research on the intuitive link between nature and mental health.

Yet these places are intentionally designed with sensory deprivation in mind.

Dont believe for one moment that if only these men could be sent to a mental facility we could all just rest our concerns. Their life is not much better in mental wards.

Read this article from which the above quote was taken.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2012/11/no-flowers-on-the-psych-ward/264923/>

Excerpts:

Psychiatric hospitals have a certain smell. Old urine hits the nostrils first and then the sting of bleach.

Perhaps I was nave to think that healing was the intention, but on the ward, I find only its absence.

Psychiatric hospitals, by definition, disempower patients. Having a crime plus mental illness on your record means a loss of certain rights.

The hospital functions as a holding cell for people not safe on the streets and not safe in jail.

Boredom fills the ward,

Administration looks at everything as a possible weapon of self or mass destruction. But we need windows and nature.

Searching for a way to up both my own and the patients spirits, I find a wealth of research on the intuitive link between nature and mental health. A few studies conclude that office workers perform better with windows and foliage. Another shows that ornamental indoor plants in hospital rooms enhance health outcomes for patients recovering from surgery.

Then I find the solution Im looking for. In this study, as I remember it, two random groups of psychiatric patients received plants. In one group, the nurses watered the plants for the patients. In the other group, the patients watered their own plants. On measures of depression before and after the experiment, the patients who watered their own plants showed the most improvement.

I have a mentally ill son, who now is doing beautifully. But there was a time when he could have been this man. I cant stomach the things we ignore in this country. I just cant.

Cruel, cruel, cruel!!! What kind of people are in charge at these places, because they all need fired. Hire some real human beings in these places. People with compassion.

This is just sickening

That is absolute abhorrent! They killed that poor man! Death Penalty for them? Life in Prison. Hmmm inconsistent AGAIN!!! Or would it be a money pay off? So so so sad for this man. I dont even live in your country, and it disgusts me. What the hell is going on there? Sort it out America.

The crap that we tolerate in this country after which we salute the flag sickens me beyond words!

P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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