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Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2010/09/21/another-prisoner-with-mental-illness-dies-in-isolation/>

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by [Jean Casella and James Ridgeway](#) | September 21, 2010

A story on Thursday in the [Alexandria \(Virginia\) Gazette Packet](#) begins: Did health-care providers at city jail leave a mentally ill inmate to die in 2008? That's the allegation at the center of a wrongful death lawsuit filed last week in the Eastern District of Virginia, charging the jail's medical services violated the constitutional provision against cruel and unusual punishment.

Twenty-four-year-old Farah Saleh Farah, who was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, was arrested in 2007 for carrying a concealed weapon, and placed in the Alexandria city jail, where health care is provided by a private company under a \$1.2 million annual contract. According to the lawsuit, employees with Correct Care Solutions lacked the training and ability to persuade the inmate of the need for him to take the required medication. Furthermore, the complaint alleges, the administrator in charge of the nurses at the jail failed to adequately train and supervise her staff, essentially leaving Farah to die of dehydration. At the time of his death, Farah was in isolation in a medical cell. The article continues:

Court documents in the case allege a tragic series of events at the jail. The narrative of the final days begins in the early morning hours of Jan. 21, 2008. That's when Farah, who was dehydrated and separated from other inmates in a medical cell. According to the complaint, he called out for a ginger ale, an I.V. and a doctor. The guards called for a licensed practical nurse on duty.

His skin seemed very thin, with ligaments and tendons pronounced under it, according to the sworn statement of one deputy. While he was always thin, in his last few days at the jail he looked positively cadaverous.

The wrongful death complaint charges that nurse essentially did nothing that she provided no medical care; that she neglected to call for a blood test to check on his status; that she failed to call for a doctor or attempt to have him sent to a local emergency room. According to the complaint, she didn't even get him a glass of water.

She simply left him alone, the lawsuit charges. She did not see him again until he was on the verge of dying from dehydration some 48 hours later.

Medical records show she logged his blood pressure at 110/75 and noted his pulse rate was 101. At 7 a.m., the nurses shift ended and she explained to the incoming registered nurse that Farah had been vomiting and nauseous. When the nurse tried to take his vital signs, Farah turned to the wall. According to court records, she did not seek assistance in taking his vital signs or attempt to send him to an emergency room. Like the first nurse, she didn't even get him a glass of water.

Two days later, Farah's condition had grown dire. He was desperately in need of medical attention, and he was hours away from dying of dehydration. Despite Farah's call for a doctor and a ginger ale, according to the lawsuit, the nurses never took action that could have saved his life. In the early morning hours of Jan. 23, a guard became concerned and once again called for a nurse.

This time the nurse arrived and checked for a pulse but found none. The lawsuit alleges that she told correctional staff it was not necessary to call 911, although she was overruled by the ranking correctional officer on the scene. Sheriff's deputies located the defibrillator and attempted to resuscitate, according to sworn statements from the deputies, who described the nurse as frozen. Once again, the complaint charges, the nurse failed to take action that might have saved his life commencing chest compressions or using a defibrillator, for example.

Farah was taken to the Alexandria Inova Hospital, where his death was attributed to dehydration due to psychosis with medication and food refusal due to schizophrenia, paranoid type. The autopsy describes sunken eyes, dry tissue, skin tenting and electrolyte abnormalities.

Farah is not the first prisoner with mental illness to die in similar circumstances. In 2006, 21-year-old Timothy Souders, another mentally ill prisoner, [died of heat exhaustion and dehydration](#) at a Jackson, Michigan prison during an August heat wave. For the four days prior to his death, Souders had been shackled to a cement slab in solitary confinement because he had been acting up. That entire period was captured on [surveillance videotapes](#), which according to news reports clearly showed his mental and physical deterioration.

In 2009, Marcia Powell, who had a history of schizophrenia, substance abuse, and mild mental retardation [baked to death](#) in the sun at a state prison in Arizona. She had been parked outdoors in an unroofed, wire-fenced holding cell in 108-degree heat. A deputy warden and two guards had been stationed in a control center 20 yards away, but nearly four hours had passed when she was found collapsed on the floor of the human cage, with burns and blisters on her body. Just this month, the local district attorney [decided not to prosecute anyone](#) at the Arizona Department of Corrections in connection with Powell's death.



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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A big thanks to Solitary Watch for your work. Our organization is a new non profit in the Phoenix area dedicated to bringing treatment rather than incarceration to those living with a mental illness. We appreciate you bringing the truth out for public viewing. We must realize that 96% of all inmates will one day return to our communities. Without a restorative justice system in place, individuals are coming back to us in much worse shape than when they first become incarcerated. Thank you for continuing to show the need for mental health treatment for those living with an organic brain disease.

this is disgusting! why wouldn't any charges be brought against the people allowing the incarcerated to die? they are playing God and the staff needs to remember that the judge already punished these persons and it isn't in their job description to do so again. these nurses are cruel and inhumane and that fact that no one will allow justice for the dead is where I pray Karma comes for them

How many of our Wounded Warriors Incarcerated suffering from untreated PTSD/Traumatic Brain Injury/etc are in such tragic situations?

The War Widows

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