

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/former-guards-north-carolina-jail-allege-inmate-abuse-and-mismanagement/>

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Carolina Public Press [reports](#) that, according to two former officers, guards at the Cherokee County Detention Center ordered incarcerated men to act as enforcers and beat up other men held in the jail.

Sergeant Joseph Preston Allen retired this spring after 11 years working at the jail because he no longer felt safe working there. He described a culture of jailhouse justice in which detention staff coerced fights between incarcerated people and refused to protect vulnerable people.

Allen told *Carolina Public Press (CPP)* that officers would target an incarcerated person for a beating and then pop the locks, intentionally leaving the man's cell unlocked so that other people could go into his room and attack him.

He also said the new jail administration ended the practice of assigning vulnerable inmates to different housing units to prevent attacks. As a result, Corey Hall, who had been detained in the jail before and was known by officers to be at risk of assault, was attacked in March after being assigned to regular housing. He was moved to the medical wing that day, but instead of keeping him in protected housing, he was moved out of the medical wing three more times over the next six weeks, and was always back within two days.

Allen's claims were confirmed in a separate interview with Officer Tom Taylor, who worked for Allen on the night shift for several years before he quit the Sheriff's Office this summer.

Both officers said that inexperience among staff and mismanagement by Sheriff Derrick Palmer, Chief Deputy Mark Thigpen, and jail administrator Mark Patterson put inmates and officers at risk.

In addition to Allen and Taylor, multiple Cherokee County residents including former Sheriff's Office employees and formerly incarcerated people contacted *CPP* about conditions at the jail. Reporters reviewed more than 500 pages of public records from multiple public agencies, including personnel files and records about incidents at the jail, and interviewed more than a dozen other individuals who supported Allen and Taylor's claims.

The jail is the subject of two separate and ongoing State Bureau of Investigation inquiries into allegations of excessive force by two guards in May and the death of a man within hours after his arrest in July.

On May 2, Sergeant Joshua Gunter clubbed George Victor Stokes in the face with a stun gun while he was handcuffed, knocking him to the ground, and Officer Wesley Killian then kicked Stokes in the head as hard as he could while Stokes was on the ground and handcuffed, Gunter [told CPP](#). Gunter, who was hired in 2015, and Killian, a part-time transport officer for just three months, were fired after news media inquiries triggered an investigation.

Allen and Taylor told *CPP* that jail leadership encourages this type of hands-on response by guards. Taylor said the inexperience of many detention staff makes matters worse.

SBI is also investigating the July death of Joshua Shane Long, who was behaving erratically when he was arrested. Even after deputies saw him take a pill, he was placed in a holding cell at the jail for about four hours. He collapsed and became unresponsive, and was eventually taken by helicopter to the University of Tennessee Medical Center in Knoxville, where he was pronounced dead.

Allen told *CPP* that when he was a sergeant, if an officer brought someone in who had ingested an unknown drug, he would require that person be cleared by Murphy Medical Center before being booked.

If (Long) ingested something, he shouldn't have even been in that jail, Taylor agreed. If he ingested something, he should have been on 24-hour watch. But really, they shouldn't have even accepted him.

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