Family Sues Orleans Parish Sheriff Over Death of HCV-Positive Inmate

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The family of a 34-year-old New Orleans man who died in prison has sued Orleans Parish Prison Sheriff Marlin Gusman.

Among numerous other allegations of abuse, the family claims that under the sheriff's watch, corrections officers at the prison denied inmate Calvin Thomas (a.k.a. Calvin Deal) medication for both hepatitis C virus (HCV) and sickle-cell anemia, the Louisiana Record reports.

Relatives of Thomas—who died November 15, 2015—allege that his death was wrongful and a result of the fact that the prison is understaffed and run by abusive employees. Before his passing, Thomas was reportedly transported to University Medical Center in New Orleans with pain related to his sickle-cell disease, which the lawsuit alleges was a result of his having been denied lifesaving medication.

Thomas was in prison awaiting trial for charges related to robbery and drugs. He had been waiting two months for a hearing, during which time he reported to family members that he had been "attacked and stabbed" by another inmate, "choked by a security guard" and repeatedly ignored during bouts of illness.

This isn't the first time either Orleans Parish Prison or Sheriff Gusman has been implicated in allegations of abuse. In 2009, the U.S. Department of Justice released a report citing the corrections facility as being infested with abusive guards and teeming with neglect. In 2012, Gusman was successfully sued for another inmate's death, which resulted in major health care reforms at the prison.

Currently, Orleans Parish Prison has an $83 million contract with Correct Care Solutions (CCS), a private company that provides medical and behavioral services for state hospitals and correctional facilities across the country. That deal was signed in 2014 to further remove Gusman from an active role at the facility.

However, the Thomas family's current lawsuit says that under the contractor, abuse remains rampant. Prison advocates have alleged for years that the sherrif's deal with the private company provides only a skeletal medical staff for its inmates and are advocating on behalf of Thomas's family in the case. CCS is named along with Gusman in the suit.

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