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Mercer County jail hit with wrongful death lawsuit over inmate beating

By Isaac Avilucea, The Trentonian

TRENTON >> A veteran Trenton firefighter has filed a wrongful death lawsuit over his son's apparent suicide nearly two years ago at the embattled Mercer County Correction Center.

Parents Kalman "Kal" Gyorffy III and Christie Varra, who are heads of their son's estate, filed suit against the county Jan. 19 claiming their son was taunted and beaten by corrections officers a day before he was found hanging in his cell April 17, 2016.

The lawsuit claims the unnamed COs engaged in a "conspiracy" to kill former inmate Anthony Gyorffy, using excessive force on him and then failing to properly supervise him while he was in his cell.

Further, the lawsuit says, the COs violated Anthony's civil rights, acted with deliberate indifference and subjected him to "cruel and unusual punishment."

Robin Lord, the attorney representing Anthony's parents, didn't have anything to add beyond what was outlined in the lawsuit — the second recent one brought against the jail over alleged prisoner abuse.

The Trentonian [extensively covered 22-year-old Anthony's apparent suicide](#), which was investigated by the Mercer County

Prosecutor's Office.

No corrections officer was charged for the alleged beating of Anthony, which the lawsuit claims "ultimately caused his death."

The lawsuit faulted the unnamed COs involved in the alleged vicious attack for not removing a bed sheet from Anthony's cell that he used to hang himself.

The county coroner ruled the death a suicide from brain complications after the elder Anthony, who was survived by his son, Anthony Jr., was found hanging in his jail cell, county officials contended.

Anthony's family was stunned by his sudden death, coming three days before he was supposed to get out of the jail. Court records showed that on April 15, the day before the alleged attack, Anthony had been allowed into Mercer County drug court, an intensive program geared toward rehabilitation.

In phone calls from the jail, Anthony told family members he wanted to get his life back on track following upheaval over the arrest that landed him at the county jail.

"I'm on a mission to find out the answers, regardless of what they might be," Kal Gyorffy, a Trenton firefighter, told The Trentonian in a previous interview in 2016.

The man's attorney, Robin Lord, in previous interviews with The Trentonian aggressively disputed the medical examiner's findings of a suicide and contended Anthony's death was "suspicious."

Lord had said Anthony was placed in the "hole," or solitary confinement, prior to his death.

Mercer County officials claimed Anthony attempted suicide in his

cell around 1:30 p.m. April 17 and was discovered unresponsive by corrections officers who called 911 and performed CPR until paramedics arrived.

Anthony was taken to a hospital and later died at his home in Bordentown after family had him taken off life support because he was brain dead.

[A prisoner advocate previously told](#) The Trentonian she contacted jail brass shortly after learning about Anthony's death demanding an investigation.

In emails to jail bosses, obtained by The Trentonian, Princeton attorney Jean Ross told Warden Charles Ellis and other county officials how inmates saw and heard Anthony being led to a remote, unmonitored part of the facility, where he was allegedly beaten and taunted as he pleaded with COs to stop.

"Sounds of a beating in cell No. 10" could be heard, until a superior shouted to corrections officers, "That's enough," Ross wrote in the emails.

She said Anthony was described by inmates as "very scared," and he allegedly cried out, "Please stop hitting me. I'm sorry."

After corrections officers stopped beating him, Ross claimed, they were heard "gloating" about it.

While the bloodied inmate was led away, inmates were directed to "step away from their windows," Ross wrote.

The allegation of Anthony being "taunted, harassed, assaulted and beaten" also appeared in the lawsuit, although they weren't attributed to Ross.

Lord, who co-filed the lawsuit with attorney Clifford Bidlingmaier,

claimed Anthony was beaten so badly by corrections officers that he suffered “serious, permanent and painful” injuries.

Lord had previously told The Trentonian that Anthony has bruises all over his body from the encounter with the COs.

The wrongful death complaint comes amid an unrelated criminal probe into the conduct of Warden Ellis and Deputy Warden Phyllis Oliver.

Lawsuits have painted [Ellis as a sex-starved Lothario](#) who [groped female corrections employees](#) and enlisted his second-in-command, Oliver, to get a nurse at the Hopewell Township jail to attend a pajama sex party.

The nurse, whose partner is a lieutenant at the jail, believed the wardens sought vengeance when she turned down their threesome overtures.

Curiously, the correction center is the only named defendant in the wrongful death lawsuit, which doesn’t directly implicate Ellis or Oliver.

Oliver, who is also being investigated for possible overtime abuse, recently [went to Lord about possibly representing her in a libel lawsuit](#) aimed at accusers who have insinuated she’s romantically involved with Ellis.

The jail has constantly been in the headlines following complaints from workers about the jail bosses and over misconduct and [prisoner abuse allegations](#) involving inmates and COs.

[Another man, Rafael Jardines](#), who is also represented by Lord, [has sued the county](#) over a May 2016 beating he endured at the jail roughly a month after Anthony’s death.

Two corrections officers, Isaac Wood III and Trachell Syphax, who were engaged at the time and have since married, [were charged in connection with Jardines' assault](#).

Trachell is the daughter of prominent Trenton businessman and [pardoned former convict Tracey Syphax](#).

A spokeswoman from the county prosecutor's office said the suspended COs cases are still pending and they have court next month.

About the Author



Avilucea has covered courts, crime and coaching kerfuffles in New Mexico, Connecticut, Massachusetts and New Jersey. He prides himself on covering First Amendment issues and was honored for helping fight against a Connecticut judge's prior restraint injunction while he worked at the Connecticut Law Tribune. Reach the author

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