

Estate of Man Who Died in St. Thomas Jail Sues BOC Officials For “Deliberate Indifference” To Hemophiliac’s Medical Needs

Outstanding Warrant Discovery Leads to Arrest: Craig Vanausdal was detained at Cyril E. King Airport on a warrant from Pennsylvania dating back to 2014

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On Wednesday May 4 2022, Craig Vanausdal was arrested at the Cyril E. King airport, after local officials discovered an outstanding warrant from the state of Pennsylvania, dating back to 2014. After agreeing to waive the extradition process, he was remanded into custody to await retrieval by Pennsylvania authorities. By May 16, Mr. Vanausdal was dead. His estate is now suing Governor Albert Bryan Jr. and officials of the Bureau of Corrections, alleging that while in custody, Mr. Vanausdal was denied the medication he relied on to keep him alive.

Mr. Vanausdal suffered from hemophilia, a genetic condition in which blood does not clot as it should, leading to the serious risk of hemorrhage and death from even minor lacerations and injuries. During his initial court proceedings, he was asked about his health conditions and indicated that his disorder necessitated an ongoing course of medication. “BOC shall give the defendant the necessary medications that is needed while in their custody every Monday, Wednesday and Friday,” presiding judge Sigrid Tejo ordered following an extradition hearing on May 6, 2022.

According to the lawsuit, the required documentation was filled out and submitted so that officials had all the necessary information regarding Mr. Vanausdal’s need for medication, including photographs of the packaging and labels. BOC’s Medical Director Linda Callwood, named as a defendant in the suit, reportedly conducted a physical on Mr. Vanausdal and took his medical history on May 9, noting his hemophilia and his medication dosing schedule of Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

At the time, Dr. Callwood is said to have decided to discard doses of expired medication that Mr. Vanausdal had in his possession, despite not having any substitute or replacement on hand. In jail without the medication he needed to keep his condition under control, Mr. Vanausdal began to suffer “deep bruising, joint pain and swelling, and unexplained and uncontrolled bleeding, while experiencing blood in both his urine and stool” the lawsuit claims.

A few days into his detention without medication, Welma Freeman-Walter, a registered nurse named as a defendant in the lawsuit, reportedly noted that Mr. Vanausdal’s ankle was swollen and tender to the touch – an indication of bleeding that the lawsuit claims should have prompted authorities to take Mr. Vanausdal to the emergency department for treatment. Instead, he remained in custody.

Dr. Callwood is alleged to have made contact with a doctor who treated Mr. Vanausdal in California, where he lived. That doctor is said to have alerted Dr. Callwood that his patient needed to have daily infusions of a specific prescribed medication, without which he would be in a “life-threatening position,” according to the lawsuit.

The suit, filed by a representative of the now-deceased man’s estate, alleges that Dr. Callwood did attempt to source the correct medication for Mr. Vanausdal, but was not able to procure any on island. The special pharmacy which she contacted informed her that the latest tranche of his prescription had been mailed to his home address on the day before he was arrested.

BOC officials reportedly requested from someone named “Taylor Hayes” that the medication be overnighted to St. Thomas, but did not offer to pay the fee to do so, which the lawsuit claims stood at over \$500. Meanwhile, Mr. Vanausdal’s condition was deteriorating.

On May 10, the lawsuit claims that he began complaining of bleeding in his right elbow, accompanied by pain so severe that he was having difficulty sleeping. The next day, the pain had intensified, and he was in a condition that should, according to the lawsuit, have necessitated a trip to the emergency department. Instead, arrangements were made for him to be seen at a local hematology and oncology center.

That visit reportedly never occurred however, “as the facility was understaffed and corrections staff was already with another inmate at an appointment,” the lawsuit claims. However a conversation between Dr. Callwood and the hematologist on staff at the center reportedly confirmed that Mr. Vanausdal’s required treatment was not available in the territory.

On May 12, local authorities reportedly contacted the Pennsylvania Sheriff's Department to request an immediate transfer due to his need for treatment. On the same day, the specialty pharmacy reportedly also contacted local officials to report that Ms. Hayes had been unable to ship Mr. Vanausdal's required medication due to cost. "It is unclear why a FedEx label was not provided to Ms. Hayes to ship the medication, when the Defendants were responsible for the medical care of Craig Vanausdal," the lawsuit argues. Nevertheless, the specialty pharmacy ultimately agreed to ship the medication directly from their facility.

The next day, BOC officials were reportedly informed that the medication had been shipped, "although the listed tracking number in the medical records is not found when searching for the package," the lawsuit alleged. Corrections officials were informed that Judge Tejo would next hear the matter on May 16. "No urgency between the dates of May 4, 2022 and May 13, 2022 to get Mr. Vanausdal out of custody and/or to send him to the hospital was made by the Defendants," the lawsuit argues, despite knowledge that he could not be treated appropriately for his severe hemophilia, "especially in light of his bleeding symptoms."

On May 13, an emergency motion was lodged with the court, asking that the matter against Mr. Vanausdal was dismissed with prejudice, since the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office had decided not to extradite him due to his medical condition.

By May 14, Mr. Vanausdal had an extremely elevated heart rate, "a systemic sign of hemorrhage," according to the lawsuit. He was also complaining of pain so severe that he was unable to walk. There were new bruises and new bleeding into his elbow, all developments that should have necessitated an emergency room visit. There were other clues that he was hemorrhaging internally, the lawsuit claims, but authorities did nothing in response to Mr. Vanausdal's increasingly desperate attempts to alert them that something was seriously wrong.

The day before he died, Mr. Vanausdal was only able to move with the help of crutches. At 3:58 a.m. on May 16 2022, the day of a scheduled court hearing to discuss the motion to dismiss the case, emergency medical services reportedly received a call and arrived at the jail to find Mr. Vanausdal "shirtless on the floor, unresponsive to any stimulus, apneic, puleless, and cold to the touch with fixated pupils." He was pronounced dead.

The lawsuit claims that even in his final moments, Mr. Vanausdal was not given the medical attention he should have received. Two correctional officers who were present with the detainee reportedly only "briefly" attempted cardiopulmonary resuscitation on Mr. Vanausdal, despite it taking over 30 minutes for EMS to arrive. "It does not appear that either correctional officer contacted medical personnel, despite a clear medical event," in which Mr. Vanausdal went from "conscious and alert" to deceased, before their eyes. After the perfunctory attempt at CPR, the two correctional officers reportedly "left Mr. Vanausdal lying on the floor...until EMS arrived."

The dead man's matter was dismissed by the court on May 20.

The treatment meted out to Mr. Vanausdal during his ill-fated time in custody of the Bureau of Corrections is a violation of the consent decree under which the Bureau operates, the lawsuit alleges. It accuses all defendants – Dr. Callwood, nurse Welma Freeman-Walter, Warden Ishmael Smittie, the two correctional officers whose names are yet unknown, BOC Director Wynnie Testamark, and Governor Albert Bryan Jr. – of "deliberate indifference" regarding Mr. Vanausdal's "serious medical needs to ambulatory, emergency, specialty, and outside services."

That deliberate indifference, the lawsuit claims, led to Mr. Vanausdal's death in custody. The lawsuit seeks damages to be paid to his estate.

As of press time, there has not been a response filed by the named defendants.

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