

Florida Department of Corrections



Office of the Inspector General

**CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION
INVESTIGATIVE ASSIST
CASE # 17-20414**



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
INVESTIGATIVE ASSIST SUMMARY REPORT



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Case Number: 17-20414

OIG Inspector: Senior Inspector Louis Cordova

Outside Agency: Florida Department of Law Enforcement

Outside Agency Investigator: Special Agent Brannan Riley

Date Assigned or Initiated: November 9, 2017

Complaint Against: N/A

Location of Incident – Institution/Facility/Office: Santa Rosa Correctional Institution

Complainant: Sergeant William Stephens

Outside Agency Case #: PE-37-0101

Use of Force Number: N/A

PREA Number: N/A

Classification of Incident: Inmate Death Investigation

Confidential Medical Information Included: Yes No

Whistle-Blower Investigation: Yes No

Chief Inspector General Case Number: N/A



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I. AUTHORITY

The Florida Department of Corrections, Office of the Inspector General, by designation of the Secretary and § 944.31, Florida Statutes, is authorized to conduct any criminal investigation that occurs on property owned or leased by the department or involves matters over which the department has jurisdiction.

The testimony references included in this report are summations of oral or written statements provided to inspectors. Statements contained herein do not necessarily represent complete or certified transcribed testimony, except as noted. Unless specifically indicated otherwise, all interviews with witnesses, complainants, and subjects were audio or video recorded.

II. METHODOLOGY

The investigation reviewed the derivations of the allegation advanced by the complainant. The scope of this investigation does not seek to specifically address tort(s), but violations of criminal statutes. The criterion used to evaluate each contention or allegation was limited to the following standard of analysis:

1. Did the subject's action or behavior violate Florida criminal statutes?

III. ANALYSIS

The standard and analysis in this investigation is predicated with the burden of proving any violation of law, established by probable cause. The evidence considered for analysis is confined to the facts and allegations stated or reasonably implied. The actions or behavior of the subject are presumed to be lawful and in compliance with the applicable Florida law, unless probable cause indicates the contrary.



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IV. DEFINITIONS

Unfounded:

Refers to a disposition of a criminal case for which probable cause does not exist to suggest the suspect's behavior or action occurred nor is an arrest or formal charge being initiated.

Closed by Arrest:

Refers to a disposition of a criminal case for which probable cause exists that an identified subject committed the offense and one for which an arrest or formal prosecution has been initiated.

Exceptionally Cleared:

Refers to a disposition of a criminal case for which probable cause exists that an identified suspect committed the offense, but one for which an arrest or formal charge is not initiated, or in the case of a death investigation, one for which no evidence exists that the death was the result of a crime or neglect.

Open-Inactive:

Refers to a disposition of a criminal case for which a criminal investigation commenced, but where evidence is insufficient to close as unfounded, closed by arrest, or exceptionally cleared.

Investigative Assist Closed

Refers to a disposition of an investigative assist, where the conduct being investigated by the outside agency did not concern allegations against a Department employee, contractor, inmate, offender, or other person either employed or under the supervision of the Department.



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V. PREDICATE

On November 9, 2017, at approximately 9:38 a.m., CST, Assistant Warden of Operations Misha Neal advised that Inmate Scott Mason, DC# P52619, an inmate housed at Santa Rosa Correctional Institution (SARCI) was being held in shower cell C3-121, in C-Dormitory, pending his placement into a confinement cell. At approximately 9:25 a.m. Inmate Mason was observed by Correctional Officer Kristopher King hanging from a shoestring, fashioned into a noose, and attached to the bars of the shower cell door. Inmate Mason's condition was [REDACTED] and he was transported to [REDACTED] where he was pronounced deceased at 10:30 a.m., by [REDACTED]. Senior Inspector Jennifer Skipper was at SARCI and assumed lead pending the notification of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE). A short time later it was determined FDLE Special Agent Brannan Riley would assume lead in this investigation. FDLE case number PE-37-0101. On March 12, 2018, the case was re-assigned to Senior Inspector Louis Cordova.

VI. SUMMARY OF INVESTIGATIVE FINDINGS

Based on the exhibits, witnesses' testimony, and the record as a whole, presented or available to the primary inspector, the following findings of facts were determined:

Investigator's Note: *The summary findings listed below were obtained from the FDLE investigative reports associated with FDLE Case# PE-37-0101.*

According to Special Agent Riley, On November 9, 2017, at approximately 10:30 a.m., he and Special Agent Andrew Tokajer responded to the SARCI. Upon arriving, they made contact with Senior Inspector Skipper who provided the following summary: On November 9, 2017, at approximately 7:00 a.m., Inmate Mason was involved in an incident that resulted in him being transferred to confinement located in C-Dormitory. While waiting for cell assignment, Inmate Mason was held in a secured single-person shower cell in Wing 2, cell 2125. At approximately 9:25 a.m., during [REDACTED] by correctional officers, Inmate Mason was discovered [REDACTED] hanging by his neck from inside the shower cell door. Correctional staff and [REDACTED] on Inmate Mason until [REDACTED] arrived and transferred him to [REDACTED]

Special Agent Riley indicated upon arrival he was escorted to C-Dormitory, Wing 2, to shower cell 2125 where Inmate Mason was found. The shower cell door was closed off with evidence tape. Outside of the shower cell on the floor was a black shoelace-like string with one end that appeared to be ripped or cut, a [REDACTED] and what appeared to be smeared feces. Upon opening the shower cell door, a pair of black slip-on clog shoes and feces were observed on the floor. From inside of the shower cell door was a black shoelace-like string looped around the top left corner bar of the door with a knot, and the portion that was hanging down appeared to be ripped or cut.

Special Agent Riley stated interviews were subsequently conducted with correctional officers, [REDACTED] and inmates.



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According to Sergeant William Stephens, on November 9, 2017, he was assigned to C-Dormitory at SARCI. Sergeant Stephens indicated at approximately 9:20 a.m., he was moving inmates around when he observed what appeared to be Inmate Mason hanging from a shower cell. Sergeant Stephens and Officer Kristopher King responded. Sergeant Stephens stated he opened the shower cell door and tried to get Inmate Mason down but the string that appeared to be a shoelace, was holding him up and would not break. Sergeant Stephens stated Inmate Mason was hanging from the string that was around the grill part of the gate. Inmate Mason was in a standing position, with his face leaning towards the door. Inmate Mason's head was up against the door and his feet were on the floor. Sergeant Stephens stated he used his keys to break the string, and he and Officer King placed Inmate Mason on the floor. Sergeant Stephens checked Inmate Mason [REDACTED]. Sergeant Stephens then [REDACTED]. Sergeant Stephens recalled [REDACTED] responded and [REDACTED] arriving and transporting Inmate Mason [REDACTED].

According to Officer Kristopher King, on November 9, 2017, he was assigned to C-Dormitory at SARCI. At approximately 9:00 a.m., Officer King asked Inmate Mason if he needed [REDACTED]. Officer King explained he recalled when Inmate Mason was housed at the Annex at SARCI and used a [REDACTED]. Officer King stated Inmate Mason told him he was [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. Officer King stated he left to get [REDACTED] but then became busy assisting [REDACTED] from other inmates. Officer King indicated as he was walking down the stairs of Wing 2 moving an inmate, he observed Inmate Mason hanging from inside of the shower cell. Officer King stated it appeared Inmate Mason was hanging from a shoelace.

According to Officer Christopher Kretzer, on November 9, 2017, he was assigned to C-Dormitory at SARCI. Officer Kretzer explained earlier that morning, as he and Sergeant Stephens were walking towards the Wing 2 gate entrance, Officer King was first to observe Inmate Mason hanging from the shower cell door (2125), and another officer left to retrieve ligature cutters. Officer Kretzer recalled Inmate Mason was hanging from a black shoestring. As other officers and [REDACTED] tended to Inmate Mason, Officer Kretzer began documenting the incident timeline while in Wing 2. Officer Kretzer stated when Inmate Mason was removed from C-Dormitory he (Kretzer) [REDACTED] with Inmate Mason from the second gate to the main unit control room, and he [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] Inmate Mason.

According to Officer Heron Pete, on November 9, 2017, he was assigned to C-Dormitory at SARCI. Officer Pete explained Inmate Mason was already in the shower cell in C-Dormitory when he began his shift at 7:00 a.m. that morning. Officer Pete explained he conducted routine checks on Inmate Scott Mason [REDACTED]. Officer Pete recalled at the [REDACTED] a.m. check, Inmate Mason appeared to be fine, describing Inmate Mason had nodded his head at Officer Pete. Officer Pete stated at approximately 9:20 a.m. when he and other officers were leaving Wing 2, Inmate Mason was discovered hanging by his neck. Officer Pete stated Sergeant Stephens and an inmate were the first people to notice Inmate Mason hanging. Officer Pete stated he left to retrieve (ligature) cutters and when he got back to Wing 2, Inmate Mason was already down on the ground and [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] Inmate Mason by other officers and [REDACTED]. Officer Pete stated it appeared to be a black shoe string that had been cut from Inmate Mason's neck.

According to [REDACTED] on November 9, 2017, [REDACTED] was assigned to C-Dormitory at SARCI. [REDACTED] was notified by corrections staff she was needed in Wing 2 for an inmate



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hanging. When [REDACTED] responded to Wing 2, Inmate Mason was being pulled out of the shower and placed on the floor. [REDACTED] did not see what Mason had been hanging from. [REDACTED] indicated an [REDACTED] utilized and [REDACTED]. Inmate Mason was [REDACTED] was continued.

According to Officer Robert Barnes, on November 9, 2017, he was assigned to internal security. Officer Barnes recalled being told he needed to respond to C-Dormitory. Once he arrived, Officer Barnes was instructed to respond to the control room to assist [REDACTED] the compound. Officer Barnes stated he was advised he would be accompanying [REDACTED] with inmate Mason. Officer Barnes stated he [REDACTED] Inmate Mason was being transported [REDACTED] After the [REDACTED] Officer Barnes stood by while [REDACTED] inmate Mason.

According to Officer Donte Kinter, on November 9, 2017, he drove the van that followed [REDACTED] Inmate Mason was being transported [REDACTED] After [REDACTED] Officer Kinter stood by while [REDACTED] Inmate Mason.

According to Inmate Kevin Rushing, he was housed in C-dormitory at SARCI on November 9, 2017. Inmate Rushing stated he was inside of his cell when he saw correctional officers remove Inmate Mason from a shower cell, place him on the floor, and not provide him [REDACTED] Inmate Rushing was advised video from the wing was reviewed and the incident did not happen the way Inmate Rushing described it. Inmate Rushing did not have any further information to provide.

According to Inmate Christopher Lehning, on November 9, 2017, Inmate Lehning was being held in a shower cell in Wing 2 of C-Dormitory near the shower cell Inmate Mason was located in. Inmate Lehning explained he was brought to C-Dormitory earlier that morning for battery of an inmate. Inmate Lehning recalled when he was brought to the shower cell he saw an old man (Inmate Mason) in another shower cell, and the next thing he remembered was seeing officers rush over and take him down out of the cell. Inmate Lehning stated the only thing he remembered hearing was a cell door rattle shortly before the officers rushed to the cell. Inmate Lehning stated Inmate Mason did not say anything to him. Inmate Lehning stated it looked as if it was a boot string around Mason's neck.

According to Inmate Skylor Taylor-Rabaza, during the morning of November 9, 2017, Inmate Taylor-Rabaza was moved from his cell in Wing 2 of C-Dormitory. Inmate Taylor-Rabaza stated when officers were escorting him out of the wing, he looked over to the shower cells and noticed an inmate (Inmate Mason) in the first shower, hanging from a string or shoelace that was around his neck. Inmate Taylor-Rabaza stated the officers rushed to the shower cell where Inmate Mason was to get him down. Inmate Taylor-Rabaza stated Inmate Mason [REDACTED] when he first saw him.

According to Special Agent Riley, a copy of the video surveillance from C-Dormitory was obtained for review. Special Agent Riley's video review revealed the following: Inmate Mason was gained into Wing 2 at approximately 6:47 a.m. Inmate Mason was [REDACTED] and was placed in the first shower cell. [REDACTED] was removed and the shower cell door was secured at approximately 6:50 a.m. and was not opened again until 9:24 a.m. when Inmate Mason was discovered hanging by correctional officers. Between 6:50 a.m. and 9:24 a.m., correctional officers were observed conducting routine checks of inmates approximately [REDACTED] by walking past each cell on the top and bottom levels of Wing 2. At approximately 9:17 a.m., movement was observed in the top corner of



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the shower cell door, the same location that the shoelace string was found tied to the door. At approximately 9:22 a.m., two (2) correctional officers entered Wing 2 and walked directly past the shower cell Inmate Mason was in, but did not appear to be looking in the direction of that cell. At approximately 9:24 a.m. correctional officers were escorting an inmate downstairs when they noticed Inmate Mason in the shower. Correctional officers rushed to open the shower cell door. An officer could be heard instructing another officer to get ligature cutters. Correctional officers placed Inmate Mason on the floor outside of the shower cell. At approximately 9:26 a.m. ██████ responded ██████ and an officer was observed ██████. A few minutes later, additional ██████ arrived with ██████. At 9:37 a.m., ██████ exited C-Dormitory with Inmate Mason ██████.

On March 2, 2018, Special Agent Riley received the autopsy report for Inmate Mason. Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Andrea Minyard performed the autopsy of Inmate Mason. Dr. Minyard's report revealed Inmate Mason's cause of death ██████, and the manner of his death was suicide. The forensic toxicology report indicated negative results from a drug screen.

On March 13, 2018, Senior Inspector Cordova received all of the investigative reports pertaining to the death investigation of Inmate Mason. Inspector Cordova's review of the death investigation completed by FDLE did not identify any administrative issues.

VII. CHARGES

There were no charges. Dr. Minyard ruled Inmate Mason's death as suicide ██████.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Based on the information gathered during FDLE Special Agent Brannan Riley's investigation, it is the recommendation of Senior Inspector Louis Cordova that the death of Inmate Mason be termed as follows:

- **Exceptionally Cleared**