



INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: KATHERINE FERNANDEZ RUNDLE DATE: JANUARY 8, 2019
State Attorney

FROM: STAFFING/REVIEW TEAM RE: IN CUSTODY DEATH
CLOSEOUT MEMO

CASE #: SAO 62-17-05-002
DECEASED: LAWSON, Willie

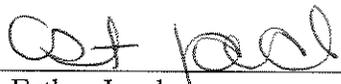
Based on the information obtained and reviewed during the course of the investigation, the conclusion of the staffing/review team is the following: The investigation has determined that police were dispatched to a call regarding a man who had stolen a beer and was behaving erratically. The subject, Willie Lawson, refused to follow police commands and appeared to be under the influence of some type of drug.

The responding officers had to use handcuffs and leg restraints to get Mr. Lawson under control in order to be transported and Baker Acted. After being admitted to Community Health of South Florida, Mr. Lawson's condition worsened and he was transported to the hospital where died the following day. The Medical Examiner determined that there were no injuries to the body and the cause of death to be Multiple Drug Toxicity.

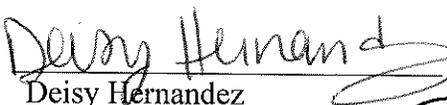
Therefore, no charges will be filed against Officers Terry Charles (30-7252), Bridget Doyle (30-8481), Christian Huete (30-7343), or Jacob Lendic (30-7262).

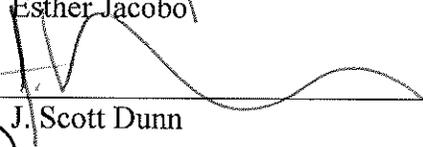
The members of the staffing/review team for this case are:

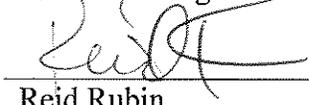

Don L. Horn


Esther Jacobo


Kathleen Hoague

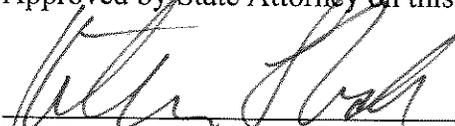

Deisy Hernandez


J. Scott Dunn


Reid Rubin


Christine Zahraiban

Approved by State Attorney on this 8 day of January, 2018.


KATHERINE FERNANDEZ RUNDLE
State Attorney





INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: STAFFING/REVIEW TEAM

DATE: JANUARY 8, 2019

FROM: LAURA ADAMS
Assistant State Attorney

RE: IN-CUSTODY DEATH CLOSEOUT MEMO

OFFICER(S) INVOLVED:	Ofc. Terry Charles MDPD ID 30-7252 Ofc. Bridget Doyle MDPD ID 30-8481 Ofc. Christian Huete MDPD ID 30-7343 Ofc. Jacob Lentic MDPD ID 30-7262
DECEASED:	Willie Lawson
INJURIES:	Accidental death due to multiple drug toxicity
DATE & TIME:	July 5, 2017 – July 6, 2017
LOCATION:	11609 S.W. 216 th Street Miami-Dade County, Florida
WEAPON:	N/A
LEAD:	Special Agent Pete Chong-Yen
CASE #:	FDLE # MI-37-0058 MDPD # PD170705254129 (Baker Act) MDPD # PD170706255767 (Death)
SAO CASE #:	62-17-07-05-002

SUMMARY OF FACTS

At about 5:23 p.m. on July 5, 2017, police officers from the Miami-Dade Police Department were summoned to a shopping center located at 11609 S.W. 216th Street in Miami-Dade County, Florida, due to a man (later determined to be Willie Lawson) who had stolen a beer and was behaving erratically. The shopping center had video surveillance cameras that captured Lawson's behavior. The police officers who responded were equipped with body-worn cameras (BWC's). The officers' reports and BWC footage, as well as shopping center videos, showed that Lawson was non-compliant with their commands and that he appeared to be under the influence of some kind of drug.

The officers had to use handcuffs and leg restraints to get him under control, but they did not use a Taser or force likely to cause any serious injury. They repeatedly told him to "relax," that they were there to help. Lawson commented that he was going to get Tased, but the officers assured him they were not going to use their Tasers. He also said he was under the influence of "Molly." Once they were able to restrain Lawson, they walked/carried him to a marked police car and transported him to Community Health of South Florida (CHI) in order for him to be Baker Acted. Lawson had previously been admitted to that facility under similar circumstances. The officers completed their paperwork and left Lawson in the care of the CHI staff. There are video cameras in the intake area of CHI, and the officers can be seen escorting Lawson into the facility. Once there, Lawson did not appear to be as out-of-control as he was at the shopping center.

After Lawson was admitted to CHI, his physical condition deteriorated. Initial drug screens at CHI showed that Lawson had cocaine in his system. Staff members at CHI said that Lawson "crashed" about an hour or less after he had been admitted to the facility. A "code blue" was initiated and CHI called 911. Fire Rescue responded and transported Lawson to the Jackson South Medical Center Crisis Unit to try to stabilize him. Lawson was not responsive to treatment at the hospital and he was pronounced deceased the following day, July 6, 2017 at 6:05 p.m. Lawson's body was transported to the Medical Examiner's Office for an autopsy.

Dr. Fintan Garavan, Ph.D., M.D. conducted the autopsy in this matter. There were no injuries to Lawson's body at the time of the autopsy. However, Dr. Garavan did note the evidence of medical intervention used to try to save Lawson's life. Blood samples that had been collected from Lawson shortly after he was admitted to CHI were analyzed by the toxicology lab at the Medical Examiner's Office. Those samples showed that he had N-Ethylpentylone, Ketamine and Cocaine in his system. Dr. Garavan determined that the cause of death was Multiple Drug Toxicity. Contributory causes of death were reported as cardiomegaly, hypertensive-type, and pulmonary emphysema.

Because Lawson's death occurred after he had been Baker Acted by the Miami-Dade Police Department, this matter was referred to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement for an investigation as an in-custody death. Special Agent Pete Chong-Yen was assigned as the lead investigator in this matter. Special Agent Chong-Yen collected evidence in this matter and turned his findings over to the State Attorney's Office for a final review.

LEGAL ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

In this case, as with other in-custody death investigations, the Office of the State Attorney reviews the evidence to determine if criminal charges should be filed in conjunction with Lawson's death. I have reviewed Special Agent Chong-Yen's file in this matter, which includes reports from the Miami-Dade Police Department as well as the Florida Department of Law Enforcement; the Medical Examiner's report; as well as 911 calls, body-worn camera and video surveillance footage. Special Agent Chong-Yen's report is hereby incorporated into this memorandum.

A thorough review of the evidence gathered in this matter indicates that no criminal charges should be filed against any of the officers involved with taking Willie Lawson into custody. Florida Statute 776.012 authorizes any person to use non-deadly force against another "when and to the extent that the person reasonably believes that such conduct is necessary to defend himself or herself or another against the other's imminent use of unlawful force." In this case, various persons at the shopping center gave sworn statements about Lawson's disruptive, out-of-control behavior. Surveillance footage and the officers' body-worn cameras corroborated those observations. Lawson was non-compliant with repeated orders to sit, lie down, and remain still. Given Lawson's behavior, the officers had reasonable cause to believe that he posed a danger to them, to others nearby, and to himself. They had no choice but use some degree of physical force in order to secure him, and in order to transport him to a mental health facility. Lawson's subsequent demise, apparently brought about due to his use of illegal drugs, is consistent with a person who was under the influence of these substances when the police were trying to secure him. Under this set of circumstances, the officers were justified in using physical force against him. The actions of these officers did not cause or contribute to the cause of the death of Mr. Lawson.

Prepared by:



Laura Adams, Assistant State Attorney