

Settlement reached in case of Broward jail inmate who died at half his weight



Raleigh Priester withered to half his body weight during his 155 days in a Broward sheriff's jail.

(Broward Sheriff's Office/courtesy)

Tonya Alanez **Contact Reporter** Sun Sentinel

Raleigh Priester, 52, withered to half his body weight and died during his 155 days in a Broward jail

The family of a mentally ill man, who they say starved to death at a **Broward County** jail, has settled a negligence lawsuit against the jail's inmate health-care provider. Terms of the settlement were confidential, court records show.

During 155 days in jail, Raleigh Priester, 52, withered to half his body weight.

The U.S. Army veteran with a two-decade history of schizophrenia died July 10, 2012, at a jail in Pompano Beach. He was found unconscious in a pool of vomit on his cell floor. He weighed 120 pounds.

Five months earlier, the 6-foot-2-inch father of two had tipped the scales at 240 pounds when he was booked into jail for allegedly throwing a rock and hitting a Fort Lauderdale parking-garage attendant in the back.

Alleging neglect, attorney Greg Lauer filed the lawsuit last summer on behalf of Priester's estate, sister, daughter, son and brother in federal court in Fort Lauderdale.

Priester "slowly died from starvation" while those in charge of caring for him deliberately ignored his deteriorating mental health and physical ailments. They also failed to provide him with medication, or adequate nutrition, the lawsuit said.

BSO did not pay anything or admit any liability whatsoever.— Broward Sheriff's Office spokeswoman said of jail negligence settlement

Lauer declined to comment on the settlement.

Priester spent his final months in solitary confinement, naked, mumbling to himself and playing an imaginary flute, jail records show.

Named along with the Sheriff's Office in the suit was Armor Correctional Health Services, which provides health care to the county's jail inmates, and two of its doctors.

"That settlement was 100% between Priester's estate and Armor," Keyla Concepcion, a spokeswoman for the Sheriff's Office, said Tuesday. "BSO did not pay anything or admit any liability whatsoever."

Citing federal medical privacy laws, Armor spokeswoman Yeleny Suarez declined to comment except to discuss the company in general terms.

Archive: Mentally ill inmate dies at half his body weight in Broward jail, family sues

"The company has a proven record of delivering quality health care to more than 40,000 patient-inmates in eight states," Suarez said in an emailed statement.

Armor has overseen health care for Broward inmates since 2004.

Priester had well-documented mental-health issues. He spent 11 years in a state mental hospital after a Broward jury in 1992 found him not guilty by reason of insanity of felony burglary and robbery charges.

He remained under the supervision of the **Broward County** mental health court until 2010, records show.

Soon after the rock-throwing incident landed Priester in jail, he took to refusing food and medication. Much of his time was spent lying in a fetal position on his bunk or banging his head on the floor, jail records show.

Three months into his jail confinement, Priester was found unresponsive on his cell floor. He had dropped down to 139 pounds.

He was treated in the intensive-care unit at Broward Health North for pneumonia, hypothermia, anemia, a blood infection, malnourishment and dehydration.

After a week in the hospital on a high-calorie diet, Priester gained 11.6 pounds, putting him up to nearly 151 pounds, records show.

Within six weeks of being returned to jail, Priester was dead.

tealanez@tribpub.com, 954-356-4542 or Twitter @talanez