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Santa Ana Corrections Officer Charged with Falsifying Jail Logs to Cover Up His Failure to Do Required Inmate Safety Checks

SANTA ANA, Calif. – A Santa Ana corrections officer has been charged with several felonies for falsifying jail logs to cover up the fact that he failed to perform required safety checks on inmate who committed suicide while in the jail. An internal investigation by the Santa Ana Police Department following the inmate's suicide revealed the discrepancies between the jail logs and the safety checks that video surveillance confirmed were never performed.

Esteban Gonzalez, 39, of Chino, is charged with three felony counts of altering public documents while working at the Santa Ana Detentions Facility in 2021. He faces a maximum sentence of 6 years in state prison if convicted of all charges.

On June 25, 2021, Correctional Officer Gonzalez was responsible for overseeing inmates in Santa Ana Jail's Module 4C. Video surveillance shows another correctional officer performing an inmate safety check on inmate Darryle Samuel at 9:31 a.m. before ending her shift and leaving-Module 4C under the responsibility of Gonzalez.

According to video surveillance, Gonzalez did not conduct subsequent safety checks until the inmates were released for lunch around 10:50 AM. Samuel did not report to lunch. Module 4C inmates finished lunch and returned to their cells around 11:13am with several inmate workers left behind to clean up and vacuum.

At about 11:18 a.m., an inmate worker discovered Samuel hanging from a bedsheet in his cell and called Gonzalez for help. Gonzalez and three other officers attempted lifesaving measures while waiting for paramedics from the Orange County Fire Authority to arrive. While firefighters performed lifesaving measures, Gonzalez is seen performing inmate safety checks and then returning to the computerized jail logs and altering them.

In the Santa Ana Police Department computerized jail logs, Gonzalez documented that he performed inmate safety checks at 10:16 a.m., and 10:18 a.m.-in contradiction with video surveillance which showed no safety checks were performed at those times. These safety checks and a purported check at 10:50 a.m. at the start of lunch were noted as "code 4" for "all clear" with the 10:50 a.m. safety check also coded "no refusals" despite the fact that Samuel never reported for lunch and was likely dead at that time.

The internal investigation by the Santa Ana Police Department revealed that while firefighters were trying to revive Samuel, Gonzalez deleted his previously inputted 10:50 a.m. safety check entry designating “code 4” and “no refusals.”

The Orange County District Attorney’s Office reviews all custodial deaths in Orange County to determine if the law enforcement agency is criminally liable for the death with the exception of the Huntington Beach Police Department, which contracts with the Orange County Sheriff’s Department.

On July 27, 2022, the Orange County District Attorney’s Office issued its legal conclusions regarding the custodial death of Samuel which determined that while the inmate’s suicide was intentional after finding out that his girlfriend was pregnant by another man a few hours prior there was not any evidence that could be proven beyond a reasonable doubt that anyone was criminally liable for Samuel’s death. As a result of a review of the jail logs, criminal charges were filed against Gonzalez for falsifying those records.

“Inmates depend on correctional officers for every aspect of their safety and well-being and in this case Correctional Officer Gonzalez failed to carry out that most basic duty,” said Orange District Attorney Todd Spitzer. “The callousness involved in desperately try to alter the jail log while paramedics were trying to revive Mr. Darryle is unconscionable. This is a betrayal of trust given to correctional officers and we will continue to hold law enforcement officers accountable to the fullest extent of the law when they break the law.”

Deputy District Attorney Deborah Einhorn of the Special Prosecutions Unit is prosecuting this case.

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