



OFFICE OF THE
DISTRICT ATTORNEY
ORANGE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

TODD SPITZER

August 14, 2026

Chief Joyce LaPointe
Costa Mesa Police Department
99 Fair Drive
Costa Mesa, CA 92626

Re: Custodial Death on February 8, 2025
Death of Inmate Lawrence Steven Adesso
District Attorney Investigations Case # 25-000285
Costa Mesa Police Department Case # 25-001742
Orange County Crime Laboratory FR# 25-41403
Orange County Coroner's Office Case # 25-00766-AZ

Dear Chief LaPointe,

Please accept this letter detailing the Orange County District Attorney's Office's (OCDA) investigation and legal conclusion in connection with the February 8, 2025, custodial death of 63-year-old inmate Lawrence Steven Adesso.

OVERVIEW

This letter contains a description of the scope and the legal conclusions resulting from the OCDA's investigation of the custodial death of Adesso. In this letter, the OCDA describes the criminal investigative methodology employed, evidence examined, witnesses interviewed, facts discovered, and the legal principles applied to review the conduct of all Costa Mesa Police Department (CMPD) personnel, as well as those under the supervision of the CMPD, involved in this custodial death incident.

On February 8, 2025, OCDA Special Assignments Unit (OCDASAU) investigators responded to Hoag Hospital, where Adesso died while in custody. During the course of their investigation of Adesso's death, the OCDASAU interviewed one witness and obtained police reports, body worn camera (BWC) footage, incident scene photographs, jail surveillance footage, medical records, and other relevant materials from the CMPD and the Orange County Crime Laboratory (OCCL).

The OCDA conducted an independent and thorough investigation of the facts and circumstances of this event and impartially reviewed all evidence and applicable legal standards. The scope and findings of this review are expressly limited to determining whether any criminal conduct occurred on the part of CMPD personnel or any other person under the supervision of the CMPD. The OCDA will not be addressing policy, training, tactics, or civil liability.

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INVESTIGATIVE METHODOLOGY

Among other duties, the OCDASAU is responsible for investigating the deaths of individuals while in custody within Orange County. An OCDASAU investigator is assigned as a case agent and is supported by other OCDASAU investigators, as well as investigators from other OCDA units.

Six investigators are assigned to the OCDASAU on a full-time basis. There are additional OCDA investigators assigned to other units in the office, trained to assist when needed. On average, eight investigators respond to an incident within an hour of being called. The investigators assigned to respond to an incident perform a variety of functions that include witness interviews, scene processing, evidence collection, and hospital investigative responsibilities as needed. The OCDASAU audio records all interviews, and the OCCL processes all physical evidence related to the investigation.

Deputy district attorneys from the Homicide, TARGET/Gangs, and Special Prosecutions Units review fatal and non-fatal, officer-involved shootings and custodial death cases and determine whether criminal charges are appropriate. Thus, when the OCDASAU investigator has concluded the investigation, the file is turned over to an experienced deputy district attorney for legal review. If necessary, the reviewing prosecutor will send the case back for further investigation.

Throughout the review process, the assigned prosecutor will consult with the Assistant District Attorney supervising the Special Prosecutions Unit of the OCDA, who will eventually review any legal conclusions and resulting correspondence. It is also common for the case to be reviewed by several experienced prosecutors and their supervisors. Ultimately, the District Attorney personally reviews and approves all officer-involved shooting and custodial death letters.

FACTUAL SUMMARY

On February 7, 2025, at approximately 7:01 p.m., CMPD officers were dispatched to the parking lot of 548 West 19th Street, Costa Mesa, in response to a report of a male subject unlawfully occupying a vehicle. The reporting party stated that the unknown male, later identified as Lawrence Addesso, was seated in the driver's seat of her white Toyota Camry. The reporting party confirmed that she did not know Addesso and had not granted him permission to enter or remain inside her vehicle.

At approximately 7:04 p.m., CMPD Gang Investigators Erick Molina and Kathleen Sapida, accompanied by Orange County Probation Officer (PO) Hector Martinez, were the first to arrive on the scene. All three were traveling together in a CMPD Police Unit. Investigators Molina and Sapida were wearing activated BWCs, which captured their interactions with Addesso.

Upon arrival, the officers observed Addesso lying on the ground, partially on his stomach and the right side of his body, adjacent to the driver's side of the Toyota Camry in the parking lot. Upon approach, officers identified themselves, stating, "Police Department." Investigator Molina took hold of Addesso's left arm while securing his right arm. Together, they rolled him onto his stomach and positioned his arms behind his back. Investigator Sapida then applied handcuffs to detain Addesso for further investigation. No force was used during the detention of Addesso.

Investigator Sapida advised Addesso that he was not under arrest but was being detained. Addesso was coherent, cooperative, and engaged in conversation with the officers. Addesso did

not exhibit any visible signs of injury. PO Martinez and Investigator Sapida assisted Addesso to his feet and escorted him to a nearby parking curb, where he was seated.

At approximately 7:07 p.m., CMPD Officer Shaun Munoz arrived on the scene to assist Investigators Molina and Sapida.

While detained on the parking curb, Addesso engaged in casual conversation with CMPD Officers. During the contact, he stated on multiple occasions that he felt tired; however, he did not report any pain or other medical concerns. It was determined that Addesso had defecated in his clothing and on the driver's seat while seated in the Toyota Camry.

At approximately 7:16 p.m., Officer Munoz placed Addesso under arrest for Vandalism, California Penal Code (CPC) 594(a)(1), Disorderly Conduct, CPC 647(e), and several outstanding warrants (Warrant numbers 25HM01169, 25HM00242, and 24HM10295). Addesso was taken into custody without incident and transported to the CMPD Jail by CMPD Officer Max Wirtzer. Addesso was seated in the rear passenger compartment of Officer Wirtzer's patrol unit and remained cooperative with all involved CMPD personnel. No force was used at any point during the arrest or transport.

At approximately 7:30 p.m., Addesso was brought into the CMPD Jail by Officer Wirtzer. CMPD Jail staff removed Addesso's soiled clothing, and he was provided with a white jumpsuit. Addesso was placed into a detox cell and monitored by CMPD Jail staff. Addesso stood on his own and dressed without assistance.

At approximately 10:07 p.m., Addesso, along with several other CMPD inmates, was transported to the Orange County Jail (OCJ), located at 44 Civic Center Plaza, Santa Ana.

Upon arrival at the OCJ, Addesso was escorted to the medical triage area and seated on the triage bench. Addesso repeatedly stated that he wanted to lie down and sleep and then lay down on the bench and refused to sit upright. CMPD Custodial Officers (CO) Christian Gonzalez and Kathleen Ramirez were required to hold Addesso in a seated position to allow OCJ medical staff to obtain his vital signs. Addesso continued to state that he wanted to be left alone so he could sleep.

Addesso refused to stand or communicate with medical personnel. Once again, CO Ramirez and CO Gonzalez assisted medical staff by holding Addesso up while at the medical triage window. Addesso refused to answer the medical screening questions but continued to state that he was tired and just wanted to sleep. OCJ medical staff rejected Addesso's booking and required Addesso to be medically cleared before booking at OCJ. At this time, Addesso refused to walk back to the jail van. CO Gonzalez and CO Ramirez used a wheelchair to transport Addesso back to the CMPD transportation van.

At approximately 11:21 p.m., CO Gonzalez transported Addesso back to the CMPD Jail. The In-Car Fleet Video system was activated during the transport of Addesso back to CMPD.

At approximately 11:35 p.m., Addesso arrived at the CMPD Jail. CO Ramirez and CMPD CO George assisted Addesso in exiting the van. CO Ramirez and CO George can repeatedly be heard on the video instructing Addesso to stand; however, Addesso stated he was unable to do

so and claimed he could not walk. CO George and CO Ramirez each took hold of one of Addesso's arms and physically assisted him back into the CMPD Jail.

At approximately 11:39 p.m., CO Ramirez placed Addesso into the sobering cell, a padded cell designated for inmates under the influence. This cell is monitored by surveillance video, which was active while Addesso was in the cell.

After being placed in the sobering cell, Addesso lay down on the floor while using his jacket as a pillow.

At approximately 11:40:58 p.m., CO Ramirez provided Addesso with a small carton of orange juice while Addesso lay on the ground. Addesso remained lying down on his side while consuming the juice. Addesso appeared extremely restless, repeatedly sitting up, shifting his legs, and turning over constantly.

At approximately 11:57 p.m., CO George and CO Ramirez entered the sobering cell to provide Addesso with water and to prepare him for transport to the hospital. Addesso was handcuffed and then stated that his legs were numb, and he was unable to move. CO Taylor George, CO Ramirez, and CMPD Officer Patricia Valdenor physically carried Addesso to Officer Valdenor's patrol vehicle, which was parked in the CMPD Jail sally port.

On February 8, 2025, at approximately 12:03 a.m., Officer Valdenor transported Addesso to Hoag Hospital for medical clearance. The In-Car Fleet Video system in Officer Valdenor's patrol unit was activated during the transport. During the drive, Officer Valdenor checked on Addesso several times, asking if he was okay. Addesso did not respond verbally, but Officer Valdenor saw that Addesso was conscious and breathing.

At approximately 12:13 a.m., Addesso arrived at Hoag Hospital. CMPD Officer Jacob Officer Banks was on scene to assist Officer Valdenor. Officer Banks and Officer Valdenor placed Addesso into a wheelchair and transported him to the Emergency Department. At that time, Addesso's eyes were open but appeared fixed straight ahead. Officers attempted to speak to Addesso, but he was only able to mumble incoherently. Officer Valdenor and Officer Banks informed the Hoag Hospital nursing staff that Addesso's condition appeared to have deteriorated since departing the CMPD Jail and during the transport to the hospital.

At approximately 1:35 a.m., after conducting several scans and testing, hospital staff determined Addesso was showing symptoms of septic shock, likely stemming from an untreated infection. Addesso was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) for further medical treatment.

At approximately 3:07 a.m., due to the severity of Addesso's condition, Addesso's warrants were reactivated, and he was released from custody.

Addesso communicated to nursing staff that he had been experiencing shortness of breath and a persistent cough over the past several days. A chest X-ray revealed evidence of pneumonia in the left lung, attributed to an infectious organism. Additionally, Addesso's medical record from Hoag noted he was hypotensive and encephalopathic, conditions believed to be secondary to extremely elevated blood pressure.

A Hoag Hospital Registered Nurse (RN) stated in an interview with OCDASAU investigators that at 7:00 a.m., shortly before the start of his shift, he was briefed by the outgoing nursing staff that Addesso had been intubated at approximately 6:00 a.m. due to low oxygen saturation and increasing restlessness. Shortly after intubation, Addesso went into full cardiac arrest for approximately five minutes. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) was performed, and Addesso was successfully revived.

The RN described Addesso's condition as critical. Addesso's skin appeared gray in color, and he required 100% oxygen and multiple high-dose vasoactive medications to maintain adequate blood pressure. Addesso displayed minimal to no neurological activity, with no response to painful stimuli and non-reactive pupils.

At approximately 3:00 p.m., despite being on high levels of medication, Addesso's heart rate and blood pressure began to decrease. Hospital staff immediately initiated lifesaving efforts, however, Addesso's heart ceased and could not be revived. At 3:25 p.m., a Hoag Hospital physician pronounced Addesso deceased.

AUTOPSY

On February 11, 2025, at approximately 9:00 a.m., Forensic Pathologist Etoi Davenport conducted the post-mortem examination of Addesso. At the conclusion, Dr. Davenport stated the cause and manner of death were pending.

An OCCL Forensic Specialist (FSP) took 48 digital photographs during the autopsy. An OCCL Forensic Scientist (FS) collected a deep muscle and bloodstain standard from Addesso.

On Tuesday, July 1, 2025, Dr. Davenport issued the final cause and manner of death. The cause was complications of acute bronchopneumonia with sepsis. The manner of death classification was "natural."

EVIDENCE COLLECTED

An OCCL FS collected the following evidence:

- Addesso's clothing
- A pink comb
- \$1.00 United States Currency
- Miscellaneous paperwork

An OCCL FSP took 52 digital color photographs documenting the scene.

EVIDENCE ANALYSIS

Toxicological Examination

A sample of Addesso's postmortem blood was collected and examined for the presence of drugs and alcohol. The following results and interpretations were documented:

Drug	Postmortem Blood
Acetaminophen (Free)	3.65 + 0.37 mg/l
Hydromorphone	Detected
Etomidate	Detected
Morphine (Free)	0.384 + 0.047 mg/L
Ondansetron	Detected
Lidocaine	Detected

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Addesso had a State of California criminal history record dating from 1981 that revealed prior arrests for the following violations:

- Burglary
- Theft
- Possession of a Controlled Substance
- Domestic Violence
- Possession of Controlled Substance Without a Prescription
- Receiving Stolen Property
- Elder Abuse
- Assault & Battery
- Under the Influence of a Controlled Substance
- Possession of Drug Paraphernalia
- Driving Under the Influence
- Child Abuse
- Court Order Violations
- Disorderly Conduct

THE LAW

Homicide is the killing of one human being by another. Murder, voluntary manslaughter, and involuntary manslaughter are types of homicide. To prove that a person is guilty of murder, the following must be proven:

- a. The person committed an act that caused the death of another person;
- b. When the person acted he/she had a state of mind called malice aforethought; and
- c. He/she killed without lawful excuse or justification.

There are two kinds of malice aforethought, express malice and implied malice. Express malice is when a person unlawfully intended to kill. Implied malice requires that a person intentionally committed an act, the natural and probable consequences of the act were dangerous to human life, at the time he acted, he knew his act was dangerous to human life, and he/she deliberately acted with conscious disregard for human life.

A person can also commit murder by his/her failure to perform a legal duty, if the following conditions exist:

- a. The killing is unlawful (*i.e.*, without lawful excuse or justification);

- b. The death is caused by an intentional failure to act in a situation where a person is under a duty to act;
- c. The failure to act is dangerous to human life; and
- d. The failure to act is deliberately performed with knowledge of the danger to, and with conscious disregard for, human life.

A person can also commit involuntary manslaughter by failing to perform a legal duty, if the following conditions exist:

- a. The person had a legal duty to the decedent;
- b. The person failed to perform that legal duty;
- c. The person's failure was criminally negligent; and
- d. The person's failure caused the death of the decedent.

In *Giraldo v. California Dept. of Corrections and Rehabilitation* (2008) 168 Cal.App.4th 231, 250-251, the court held that there is a "special relationship" between jailer and prisoner:

"[T]he most important consideration 'in establishing duty is foreseeability.' [citation] It is manifestly foreseeable that an inmate may be at risk of harm.... Prisoners are vulnerable. And dependent. Moreover, the relationship between them is protective by nature, such that the jailer has control over the prisoner, who is deprived of the normal opportunity to protect himself from harm inflicted by others. This, we conclude, is the epitome of a special relationship, imposing a duty of care on a jailer owed to a prisoner, and we today add California to the list of jurisdictions recognizing a special relationship between jailer and prisoner."

California Government Code section 845.6 codifies that the special relationship that exists in a custodial setting gives rise to a legal duty, as follows:

"[A] public employee, and the public entity where the employee is acting within the scope of his employment, is liable if the employee knows or has reason to know that the prisoner is in need of immediate medical care and he fails to take reasonable action to summon such medical care."

Criminal negligence involves more than ordinary carelessness, inattention, or mistake in judgment. A person acts with criminal negligence when he acts in a reckless way that creates a high risk of death or great bodily injury, and a reasonable person would have known that acting in that way would create such a risk. In other words, a person acts with criminal negligence when the way he acts is so different from how an ordinarily careful person would act in the same situation that his or her act amounts to disregard for human life or indifference to the consequences of that act.

An act causes death if the death is the direct, natural, and probable consequence of the act and the death would not have happened without the act. A natural and probable consequence is one that a reasonable person would know is likely to happen if nothing unusual intervenes.

There may be more than one cause of death. An act causes death only if it is a substantial factor in causing the death. A substantial factor is more than a trivial or remote factor; however, it does not need to be the only factor that causes the death.

LEGAL ANALYSIS

There is no evidence of express or implied malice on the part of any CMPD personnel or any inmates or other individuals under the supervision of the CMPD. Accordingly, the only possible type of homicide to analyze in this situation is murder or manslaughter under the theory of failure to perform a legal duty.

The CMPD owed Addesso a duty of care. There is no evidence, however, that the duty was breached- either intentionally (as required for murder) or through criminal negligence (as required for involuntary manslaughter).

Addesso was not mistreated during his time in custody. While Addesso appeared to be in an altered state, there was nothing to suggest that he was suffering from a medical emergency. Rather, his condition appeared to be consistent with being under the influence of a controlled substance. Furthermore, he didn't report any medical concerns or pain; rather, he reported that he was tired. He was coherent, cooperative, and engaged with the CMPD investigators. Following his arrest, he was placed in a detoxification cell at the CMPD and did not appear to be suffering from anything other than potentially being under the influence. When he was transported to the OCJ, he simply indicated that he wanted to lie down and sleep.

When the OCSD medically rejected Addesso because of his refusal to cooperate with his medical screening, CMPD promptly took him back to the CMPD Jail and placed him in the detoxification cell, giving him juice to drink. While in the cell, Addesso seemed restless, but not in medical distress, and he did not indicate he needed help.

When the CMPD COs were preparing to transport Addesso to the hospital, he complained of leg numbness and being unable to move. Within four minutes, Addesso was transported to Hoag Hospital and arrived within 10 minutes.

It was only after scans and testing that it was determined that Addesso was showing signs of septic shock and untreated infection. Unfortunately, the subsequent medical intervention was unsuccessful in saving Addesso. Ultimately, Addesso's death was a result of complications of acute bronchopneumonia with sepsis.

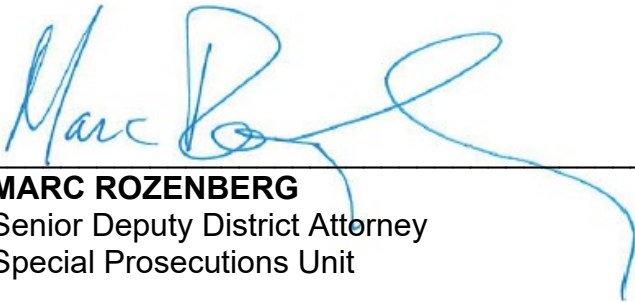
There is nothing to indicate that Addesso's death was the result of inaction or improper action of CMPD personnel or those under the supervision of CMPD.

CONCLUSION

Based on all the evidence provided to and reviewed by the OCDA, and pursuant to applicable legal principles, it is our conclusion that there is no evidence to support a finding that any CMPD personnel or any individual under the supervision of the CMPD failed to perform a legal duty causing the death of Lawrence Addesso.

Accordingly, the OCDA is closing its inquiry into this incident.

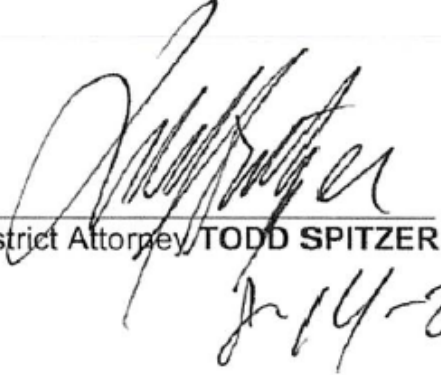
Respectfully submitted,



MARC ROZENBERG
Senior Deputy District Attorney
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Read and Reviewed by **STEVEN SCHRIVER**
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Read and Approved by District Attorney **TODD SPITZER**

2-14-2016