



OFFICE OF THE
DISTRICT ATTORNEY
ORANGE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA
TONY RACKAUCKAS, DISTRICT ATTORNEY

November 29, 2017

Acting Chief David Valentin
Santa Ana Police Department
60 Civic Center Plaza
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Re: Custodial Death on June 20, 2017
Death of Christian Isaac Arias
District Attorney Investigations Case # SA 17-017
Santa Ana Police Department Case # 17-15737
Orange County Crime Laboratory Case # 17-50974

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CHIEF OF STAFF

Dear Chief Valentin,

Please accept this letter detailing the Orange County District Attorney's Office's (OCDA) investigation and legal conclusion in connection with the above-listed incident involving the June 20, 2017, custodial death of 30-year-old inmate Christian Arias.

OVERVIEW

This letter contains a description of the scope and the legal conclusions resulting from the OCDA's investigation of the custodial death of Arias. In this letter, the OCDA describes the investigative methodology employed, evidence examined, witnesses interviewed, facts discovered, and the legal principles applied to determine whether criminal culpability exists on the part of any Santa Ana Police Department (SAPD) personnel or any other person under the supervision of the SAPD.

On June 20, 2017, OCDA Special Assignment Unit (OCDASAU) Investigators responded to Orange County Global Medical Center (OCGMC), where Arias died while in custody after receiving medical treatment at the hospital. During the course of this investigation, the OCDASAU interviewed two witnesses, as well as obtained and reviewed reports from the SAPD and Orange County Crime Laboratory (OCCL), incident scene photographs, and other relevant materials.

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 SAPD personnel or any other person under the supervision of the SAPD. The OCDA will not be addressing any possible issues relating to policy, training, tactics, or civil liability.

INVESTIGATIVE METHODOLOGY

Among other duties, the OCDASAU is responsible for investigating custodial deaths within Orange County when an individual dies while in custody. 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 investigative functions that include

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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.

When the OCDASAU Investigator has concluded the investigation, the file is turned over to a veteran deputy district attorney for legal review. Deputy district attorneys from the Homicide, TARGET/Gangs, and Special Prosecutions Units review fatal, as well as non-fatal, officer-involved shootings and custodial death cases and determine whether criminal charges are appropriate. Throughout the review process, the assigned prosecutor will be in consultation with the Assistant District Attorney supervising the Special Prosecutions Unit, who will eventually review and approve any legal conclusions and resulting memos. The case may often be reviewed by multiple veteran prosecutors, their supervisors, the Chief of Staff, and the District Attorney. If necessary, the reviewing prosecutor may send the case back for further investigation.

FACTS

On June 10, 2017, at approximately 11:05 a.m., SAPD Officers Bradley Sharp and Christopher Inégués were inside Friendly Liquor, located at 1235 West 1st Street in Santa Ana, speaking with the business owner on an unrelated call. Arias entered the store and asked the officers if he could speak with them. Officers Sharp and Inégués exited the store to speak with Arias. The officers observed Arias had a 3-pack of Budweiser tall beer cans, one can already open, in his hands. Arias also had blood around his mouth and on his teeth, was perspiring profusely (despite the temperature being approximately 70 degrees), and was pacing back and forth. Arias' speech was rapid, and much of what he said was nonsensical.

Arias asked the officers if they could tell him if he was on probation. They told him they could, but first they would need to know his name. Arias seemed reluctant to provide the officers with his name. Officer Inégués asked Arias when he last used "meth". Arias said he used last night. Officers Sharp and Inégués both believed based on Arias' symptomology that he was currently under the influence of methamphetamine. The conversation with Arias lasted for approximately five minutes. During that time Arias was allowed to move freely, and he was never patted down or directed to sit down. Ultimately, Arias walked away from the officers without providing his name or determining if he was on probation.

After Arias left, Officers Sharp and Inégués came to the conclusion they could not allow Arias to walk away. They believed based on Arias' level of intoxication he was a danger to himself or others. Both officers entered their marked black and white police vehicles and set out to find Arias. Officer Inégués saw Arias walk south through the Big K's Burgers parking lot on 1320 West 1st Street and saw him turn his head and look toward him then walk into a business. Officer Inégués circled around and saw Arias, now outside hiding behind a parked truck. Officers Sharp and Inégués exited their vehicles and told Arias to stop. Arias replied he had not done anything and walked north, away from the officers. The officers followed Arias and again told him to stop. Arias ran west on 1st Street into the middle of the roadway. As the officers closed in on Arias, he dropped to the ground and said, "Okay, I give up." Officers Sharp and Inégués rolled Arias onto his stomach and handcuffed him without incident.

When Officers Sharp and Inégués lifted Arias to his feet, they noticed Arias was bleeding from a small cut on his right arm, below his elbow. They escorted Arias approximately 100 feet, behind Big K's Burgers, to their police vehicle. Arias passively resisted by repeatedly tensing up and leaning back. This made it difficult for the officers to walk him back to the police vehicle. Once at the police vehicle, Arias was placed against the rear quarter panel and searched. While Officer Sharp conducted the search, Officer Inégués attempted to control Arias by holding onto his arm and pressing his body against the police vehicle. Big K's Burgers surveillance video shows Officer Inégués holding Arias against the police vehicle while Officer Sharp conducted a pat down search. Arias flailed his upper torso side to side forward and backward until he fell to his knees. Once on his knees, Officers Sharp and Inégués guided Arias to the ground and then rolled him onto his stomach. Arias remained on the ground for approximately 40 seconds. During that time Officer Sharp stood over him and held him down. Officer Sharp placed his left hand on Arias' shoulder and his right hand on the small of Arias' back. No force was used by either officer while Arias was on the ground.

The officers grabbed hold of Arias' biceps and lifted him to his feet. With his back turned toward the open back door, the officers walked Arias backwards and placed him in the back seat of the police vehicle. Once in the backseat, Arias refused to pull his legs into the vehicle; Officer Inégués went around to the passenger side of the vehicle, grabbed hold of Arias'

shoulders and pulled him into the vehicle. Officer Sharp was then able to close the driver side backdoor. Because Arias had a visible injury and the officers had been exposed to Arias' blood, the officers requested an SAPD supervisor respond to their location.

At approximately 11:22 a.m., Sergeant Sergio Enriquez arrived and spoke with Officers Sharp and Inégués. Sergeant Enriquez learned that Officers Sharp and Inégués had been exposed to Arias' blood while taking him into custody. The officers told Sergeant Enriquez the blood was from an injury Arias had sustained prior to their contact. Sergeant Enriquez opened the back door of the police vehicle and Arias immediately attempted to escape. Sergeant Enriquez held his hand out to prevent his escape, and he saw Arias had blood around his mouth and on his right arm. The sergeant also noticed Arias was sweating profusely and acting erratically. When Arias spoke, his speech was tangential and unintelligible. Arias had a strong odor of an alcoholic beverage on his person and appeared to possibly be under the influence of methamphetamine. Based on Arias' visible injuries and erratic behavior, Sergeant Enriquez requested paramedics respond.

At approximately 11:43 a.m., Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) Engine 75 arrived on scene. The responding paramedic saw Arias seated in the rear seat of a police vehicle. Arias was sweating profusely and appeared agitated. The paramedic leaned down to better assess Arias, but when he did Arias lunged toward him. The paramedic believed Arias was attempting to escape, and he raised his knee to prevent the escape. Based on Arias' demeanor, Sergeant Enriquez decided it would be safer, for all involved, if Arias was transported by Officer Inégués to the SAPD Detention Facility where paramedics could examine Arias in a controlled environment. The detention facility security video showed Inégués park his police vehicle near the front doors of the jail and remain in the vehicle until the correctional staff exited the facility. Officer Inégués told the correctional staff Arias was under arrest for public intoxication, was uncooperative and bleeding from his mouth and arm. While waiting for a spit mask to be brought out, Correctional Officer Elizabeth Alvare opened the rear driver side door and began to speak with Arias. Officer Alvare saw Arias was sweating profusely, appeared very agitated, and was unable or unwilling to communicate with her.

Once the spit mask arrived, Officer Alvare went around to the passenger side of the vehicle, opened the rear door, and placed the mask over Arias' head from behind. Spit masks are made of a loose-fitting mesh designed to slide over the individual's head and prevent the individual from projecting spittle, while also allowing the individual to breathe and see. With the spit mask over Arias' head, Correctional Officer Pedro Luna reached inside the vehicle, grabbed hold of Arias' legs and pulled them free of the backseat. Once Arias' legs were out of the car, Officers Luna and Gonzalez assisted Arias out of the car and onto the inmate restraint chair. The inmate restraint chairs are used to restrain uncooperative or combative inmates and designed to prevent injury to prisoners and jail staff. They are constructed of heavy gauge metal, with wheels attached to the bottom. The chairs are equipped with several belts, much like seat belts, that can be fastened around the prisoner's torso and extremities. The fastened belts restrict the prisoner's movements; the wheels allow the inmate to be moved from one location to another without being removed from the chair.

After Arias was placed in the restraint chair the correctional staff began to fasten the belts. The first belt fastened was the lap belt; once the lap belt was secured Arias began to resist. The correctional staff next secured Arias' legs. Arias' resistance was such that the restraint chair began to rock back and forth. It was necessary for a Correctional Officer to grab hold of Arias' head with both hands and place his right leg across his lower torso in order to keep the chair stationary. With Arias' legs now restrained, the correctional staff bent Arias' upper body forward so the handcuffs could be removed and his arms could be placed in chair restraints. As the staff struggled to get Arias' right arm restrained, Arias began to vomit a red liquid that smelt of beer. Arias then lost consciousness.

The paramedic walked over to assess Arias and determined he was unconscious, not breathing, and had no carotid pulse. SAPD personnel removed Arias' handcuffs and moved him from the restraint chair to a gurney. The paramedic initiated chest compressions and Arias was loaded into Care Ambulance # 9799. At approximately 12:11 p.m., Arias was transported Code 3 (lights and siren activated) by ambulance to Orange County Global Medical Center (OCGMC). While in transport, the attending paramedic initiated full Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), suctioned Arias' airway and provided oxygen via an air-bag valve mask. The electrocardiogram (EKG) monitor showed Arias had pulseless electrical activity (PEA). The paramedic started an intravenous line (IV) in Arias' left arm and administered normal saline solution with one milligram of

Epinephrine. The EKG monitor showed Arias was now in Asystole (no electrical activity). CPR was continued and an additional dose of epinephrine was administered.

At approximately 12:17 p.m., the ambulance arrived at OCGMC and Arias was released into the care of the Emergency Room medical staff. Arias was in full cardiac arrest, unconscious, not breathing, cyanotic and asystole. OCGMC medical personnel continued CPR, drew a blood sample, intubated and administered Epinephrine and Narcan via an IV line. Restoration of Spontaneous Circulation was achieved at approximately 12:17 p.m., and CPR was stopped. The attending physician requested Computerized Tomography (CT) Scans of Arias' head, abdomen, pelvis, and chest. The scans found no significant trauma. The toxicology report from the blood draw showed Arias had methamphetamine in his system. Arias was transferred from the emergency room to ICU, room 24, suffering from multi-organ failure; his prognosis was poor.

Arias suffered from the following conditions while at OCGMC:

- Anoxic encephalopathy (oxygen deprivation to the brain)
- Sepsis (body's response to infection that can lead to tissue damage, organ failure, and death.)
- Severe metabolic/lactic acidosis (excessive acid accumulation)
- Hyperkalemia (high potassium)
- Aspiration Pneumonia (complication of pulmonary aspiration)
- Respiratory failure

Medical staff noted no significant trauma on Arias' body; X-rays showed no broken bones.

On Tuesday, June 20, 2017, OCGMC medical staff met with Arias' family, and the decision was made to withdraw care. At 6:19 p.m., all mechanical care was withdrawn. At 6:30 p.m., Arias was pronounced deceased.

AUTOPSY

On June 21, 2017, Dr. Nicole Ellis, a forensic pathologist with the Orange County Coroner's Office, conducted an autopsy on the body of Arias. Following the autopsy, Dr. Ellis stated the preliminary examination of Arias revealed petechia to right eye, fatty liver, and enlarged heart. The pathologist found no signs of bruising on the upper torso indicative of someone kneeling on and/or applying great force to the torso. There was minor discoloration on Arias' neck, but no internal trauma; the hyoid was intact. On Oct. 26, 2017, Dr. Ellis issued the final autopsy report concluding that Arias' manner of death was accidental. The cause of death was anoxic encephalopathy due to effects of methamphetamine. Other associated conditions noted were hypertrophic cardiomegaly and clinical history of methamphetamine abuse.

EVIDENCE ANALYSIS

Toxicological Examination

A sample of Arias' ante-mortem blood was collected for testing. The blood was examined for the presence of drugs and alcohol. The following results and interpretations were documented:

<i>DRUG</i>	<i>MATRIX</i>	<i>RESULTS & INTERPRETATIONS</i>
Amphetamine	Ante-mortem Blood	Detected
Methamphetamine	Ante-mortem Blood	Detected

The estimated methamphetamine and amphetamine concentrations found in the ante-mortem blood were consistent with abuse levels. The results were not quantitated due to insufficient sample volume.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Arias had a State of California Criminal History record that revealed arrests dating back to 2003 for the following violations:

- Assault and battery
- Burglary

- Violation of a domestic violence restraining order
- Taking a vehicle without owner's consent
- Under the influence of a controlled substance
- Providing false information to a peace officer
- Probation violation
- Obstructing a peace officer

SURVEILLANCE VIDEO INFORMATION

As part of the investigation, surveillance videos from Friendly Liquor Store, Big K's Burgers, and the SAPD sally port were obtained and reviewed.

In the Friendly Liquor Store surveillance video, Arias makes the initial contact with both officers. The officers are seen speaking casually with Arias for several minutes, and at no time do they touch or detain him. Later, the video shows that the officers walk away from Arias, who is now off camera, and get into their police cars, again without detaining him. Lastly, the video shows both police cars leaving the parking lot.

In the videos from Big K's Burgers, one angle captured Arias walking alongside the restaurant, drinking out of a large can of beer. Another angle a few minutes later shows the officers walking Arias back to their patrol cars. Arias is clearly detained, and appears to be resisting by turning his body and being rigid in his footsteps as if to try to "backpedal" away from where the officers are leading him. Another camera captured the officers escorting Arias to the police car, patting him down, guiding him to the ground, and handcuffing him. After he is handcuffed, the officers place him in the police car and close the door. A short time later, a sergeant arrives on scene. After a few more minutes, paramedics arrive on the scene and attempt to contact Arias in the back of the patrol car. Shortly thereafter, that attempt is stopped. The officers and the paramedics leave the scene.

Lastly at SAPD, officers arrive at the sally port and correctional officers come out to assist. One officer puts a spit mask on Arias. They pull him out of the vehicle and attempt to put him in a prisoner restraint seat. It appears he is struggling with the officers. Arias then vomits and loses consciousness. Paramedics arrive, place Arias on a gurney, and begin CPR. Finally, Arias is loaded into an ambulance and is transported out of view of the surveillance video.

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 human being;
- 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 the 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/she acted he/she knew his/her 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:

"The most important consideration 'in establishing duty is foreseeability.' 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 845.6 provides 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/she 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/she acts is so different from how an ordinarily careful person would act in the same situation that his/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

In this case, there is no evidence whatsoever of express or implied malice on the part of any SAPD personnel or any other individuals under the supervision of the SAPD. 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. Although the SAPD owed Arias a duty of care as soon as he was detained or taken into custody, the evidence does not support a finding that this duty was in any way breached -- either intentionally (as required for murder) or through criminal negligence (as required for involuntary manslaughter).

Arias had a clinical history of methamphetamine abuse, and all of his injuries were pre-existing at the time of his contact with the SAPD on June 20, 2017. When Arias initiated contact with Officers Sharp and Inégués, he was holding an open beer can, had blood around his mouth and on his teeth, was perspiring profusely (despite the temperature being approximately 70 degrees), and was pacing back and forth. In addition, his speech was rapid, and much of what he said was nonsensical. Arias admitted to using methamphetamine the night before. Based on Arias' symptomology, Officers Sharp and Inégués both believed he was currently under the influence of methamphetamine. After Arias freely walked away, Officers Sharp and Inégués concluded that based on Arias' level of intoxication he was a danger to himself or others. Therefore, the officers decided to find and detain Arias for his own safety and the safety of others.

Despite his continuous resistance throughout this incident, Arias was never injured as a result of his contact with SAPD personnel or any individuals under the supervision of the SAPD. When officers Sharp and Inégués found Arias again, they ordered him to stop. Arias refused and ran into the middle of the roadway. Eventually, Arias stopped and dropped to the

ground. The officers rolled Arias onto his stomach and handcuffed him without incident. When Officers Sharp and Inégués lifted Arias to his feet, they noticed Arias was bleeding from a small cut on his right arm, below his elbow. Arias passively resisted while being escorted to the police vehicle by repeatedly tensing up and leaning back. Once at the vehicle, Arias also resisted the officers' search of his person. As described above, the officers always acted appropriately in response to Arias' resistance.

Once Arias was in custody, SAPD personnel took several special steps in responding to Arias' physical condition and ensuring any medical needs he might have could be safely and quickly met. Due to Arias' visible injury and their exposure to his blood, the officers requested a supervisor respond to their location. Again, after the supervisor arrived at the scene, and as discussed above, SAPD personnel as well as paramedics responded appropriately to Arias' behavior and then transported him to the hospital. There is no evidence whatsoever any SAPD personnel or paramedics acted inappropriately in handling Arias.

At OCGMC, Arias was released into the care of the Emergency Room medical staff. Arias was in full cardiac arrest, unconscious, not breathing, cyanotic, and asystole. OCGMC medical personnel continued lifesaving treatment. Restoration of Spontaneous Circulation was achieved, and CPR was stopped. CT Scans of Arias' head, abdomen, pelvis, and chest found no significant trauma. Toxicology results showed Arias had methamphetamine in his system. Medical staff noted no significant trauma on Arias' body; X-rays showed no broken bones. Arias was transferred from the emergency room to the ICU, suffering from multi-organ failure. Arias had suffered anoxic encephalopathy, sepsis, severe metabolic/lactic acidosis, hyperkalemia, aspiration pneumonia, and respiratory failure. Only after OCGMC medical staff met with the Arias family was the decision made to withdraw care.

Ultimately, there is no evidence Arias sustained an injury while in SAPD custody, even during his vigorous resistance. There was no indication Arias suffered, or was suffering, from any of the conditions he experienced at the hospital. There was also no indication these conditions were imminent. SAPD personnel did not do anything, intentionally or negligently, to exacerbate Arias' condition at any time. To the contrary, SAPD took several measures to ensure they could safely and adequately respond to Arias' condition at the time as well as any problems that might ensue.

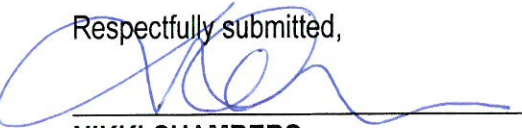
All available records support the conclusion the SAPD met its legal duty with the appropriate standard of care. Thus, there is no evidence to support a finding that any SAPD personnel or any individual under the supervision of the SAPD was criminally negligent or failed to perform a legal duty owed to Arias.

CONCLUSION

Based on all the evidence provided to and reviewed by the OCDA, and pursuant to applicable legal principles, it is our conclusion there is no evidence to support a finding of criminal culpability on the part of any SAPD personnel or any individual under the supervision of the SAPD.

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

Respectfully submitted,


NIKKI CHAMBERS

Deputy District Attorney
Special Prosecutions Unit


Read and Approved by **EBRAHIM BAYTIEH**

Assistant District Attorney
Supervising Head of Court – Special Prosecutions Unit