

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Board of County Commissioners

January 25, 2023



Okaloosa County Chief Correctional Officer responds to recent inmate deaths

Okaloosa County, Florida - As the Chief Correctional Officer of the Okaloosa County Department of Corrections, I am deeply saddened by the recent inmate deaths that have occurred within our facility. I assure the community that we take these incidents very seriously and follow proper protocol in investigating any and all inmate-related deaths.

In accordance with proper protocol, the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office immediately conducts an independent investigation into the facts surrounding any inmate death. These types of investigations include, but are not limited to, medical issues, narcotics overdoses, suicides, accidental deaths, or any other incident that may cause a death. We understand that death investigations can remain in an open status for an extended period of time due to the waiting period for autopsy and toxicology results from the Medical Examiner's Office. It is also important to remember that we are bound by strict HIPAA privacy laws that restrict the dissemination of a person's medical information. This type of information would be included in any death related to medical issues.

We would like to assure our community that we are taking appropriate measures within our corrections and medical staff to advance internal oversight in medical evaluations. Our Correctional Officers are highly trained and truly care about keeping Okaloosa County safe. Our officers and medical staff work extremely hard to maintain our department's state accreditation status as an Excelsior Agency, and our medical and mental health department is nationally accredited through the National Commission on Correctional Health Care.

In addition to the investigations being conducted, we continue to take and intensify steps to ensure the jail is a safe environment for all inmates and staff. These include regular staff training, implementing new safety protocols, and conducting regular facility and inmate inspections.

We understand the importance of transparency and quality in these investigations, and we have faith in the abilities of the Sheriff's investigators to conduct thorough investigations and bring forward accurate findings.

We extend our deepest condolences to the families and loved ones of those who have passed away and assure them that we are doing everything in our power to ensure the safety and well-being of all inmates and staff within our facility.

- *Chief Correctional Officer Nolan S. Weeks III*

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