

County sued over slaying of inmate

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CAMDEN - The daughters of Joel Seidel, the mentally ill inmate beaten to death three months ago in the Camden County Correctional Facility, filed a civil-rights lawsuit yesterday seeking damages

The lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court in Camden, contends the death was the result of county officials' "recklessness and deliberate indifference" to protecting and treating Seidel and other mentally ill inmates and to properly handling and segregating Marvin Lister, a criminally insane inmate charged with killing Seidel.

"This lawsuit is going to provide a means of learning the truth about what happened to Joel Seidel and why he was allowed to be brutally killed - murdered - in the Camden County prison," said attorney Thomas Kline, whose firm, Kline & Specter, is representing Sharon Clark and Devra Seidel.

Joel Seidel, 65, a frail former stockbroker from Cherry Hill, was pummeled to death Jan. 27, nearly a month after he had been jailed for violating an order barring contact with his former wife and a daughter.

Lister, his cell mate, who is more than 6 feet tall, had been jailed on allegations he sexually assaulted another patient at the Ancora Psychiatric Hospital in Winslow.

"A lawsuit like this not only serves as a vehicle for compensation for the family, but also to enable an independent investigation by the most interested parties, namely his daughters, and will allow, hopefully, corrective measures to be taken in the future," Kline said.

The suit names the county, its jail and Department of Corrections, the deputy county administrator, former warden David Owens, current warden Eric Taylor, and three corrections officers on duty the night Seidel was killed: Officer James Foster, Sgt. Dorothy Williams and Lt. James McIntyre.

It also names Steininger Behavioral Care Services and Prison Health Services Inc., both of which provide medical care and other mental-health services for the prison.

Spokesman Ron Tomasello said the county had not seen the lawsuit and would not comment. Owens and Taylor also said they had not seen the suit.

Steininger spokesman Jim Monaghan said the company would have no comment. Officials at the Prison Health Services office in Verona, Essex County, said no one was available to comment.

Stuart Alterman, an attorney for Foster, said the prison's problems were the fault of high-level management, not the corrections officers.

"That jail has been run in a lopsided manner. It's... motivated by profit, and now they have a major, catastrophic problem," he said. "The officers do the best they can with what they have."

Foster and Williams were suspended without pay after Seidel's death and face possible termination. McIntyre, the shift commander that night, was administratively charged with failure to supervise.

Alterman said that the officers faced disciplinary hearings at the end of May, and that the county had not released documents on the case that he was legally entitled to see.

"There are due-process issues developing," he said. "They're not giving me anything I can use to defend my client. I'd like to see what they're using to justify their actions."