

Family of man killed in Camden County jail files wrongful death suit

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CAMDEN, N.J. -- Two daughters of a man fatally beaten while being held in the Camden County jail have filed a federal wrongful death lawsuit against the jail and county corrections officials.

In the suit filed Wednesday in U.S. District Court, Sharon Clark and Devra Seidel, co-administrators of Joel Seidel's estate, blame his death on jail overcrowding, a failure to move him to a hospital, psychiatric facility or his own cell, and inadequate observation of him while in custody.

Seidel, 65, of Cherry Hill, allegedly was stomped to death Jan. 27 by Marvin Lister, 35, another inmate who had a history of violence while in custody. Lister was charged with Seidel's death, but that case has been put on hold while authorities determine Lister's competence.

"This tragedy was preventable and we intend to prove that the reckless and deliberate indifference of the prison guards and officials led to the death of Mr. Seidel," Tom Kline, an attorney for Seidel's daughters told the Courier-Post of Cherry Hill.

Named as defendants are the Camden County Jail, Camden County Department of Corrections and the county itself; and Prison Health Services Inc. and Steininger Behavioral Care Services, both of which had contracts to provide services to inmates.

In addition, corrections officers James Foster, James McIntyre and Dorothy Williams; Warden Eric Taylor; and deputy county administrator and former Warden David Owens are listed as defendants.

County officials declined comment on the lawsuit, saying they had not yet been served with it.

Seidel, a frail man, was incarcerated for violating a restraining order and was placed in the same psychiatric unit cell with Lister.

The daughters' lawsuit also contends Lister threatened a cellmate just three days before their father was placed in the same cell with him.

That inmate was so intimidated by the threats that he reported them to jail officials and was removed from the cell and Seidel was moved in, according to the lawsuit.

The county prosecutor's office conducted a criminal probe into whether records that track the frequency of guards patrolling jail cells were falsified, but earlier this month it decided not to file charges against any jail employees in Seidel's death.

A federal review of conditions at the jail recommended the facility study its inmate population, staffing and consider imposing a cap on inmates. Two other studies on jail conditions are ongoing.

State Human Services officials are studying how mentally ill inmates are treated at the jail.