



Woman With HIV Died Due to Neglect While in Jail, Alleges Lawsuit [VIDEO]

“What happened to Holly Barlow-Austin was not an isolated incident,” claims the Texas lawsuit against a for-profit jail.

September 23, 2020 By [Trent Straube](#)

After suffering nearly 10 weeks of abuse and medical neglect at a for-profit jail in eastern Texas, Holly Barlow-Austin was taken to a hospital where she died of meningitis as a result of her mistreatment in jail, alleges a lawsuit filed in eastern Texas on behalf of her family, [reports the Texarkana Gazette](#).

The lawsuit claims that staff at LaSalle Corrections failed to monitor Barlow-Austin and address her medical needs, deprived her of water, didn't transport her to a hospital in time and kept her under inhumane conditions. By the time she was taken to the emergency room, alleges the complaint, she was malnourished, blind and so disoriented she struggled to crawl and find food and water in her cell.

LaSalle Corrections runs the Bi-State Justice Center in Bowie County, Texas, where Barlow-Austin was jailed. LaSalle also operates jails in Arizona, Georgia and Louisiana.

This is the latest atrocity I've been working on. I've handled many cases involving cruel and inhumane treatment of jail detainees. This case is right up there with the worst of them.

Posted by [Erik Heipt](#) on [Wednesday, September 16, 2020](#)

Barlow-Austin, who was HIV positive, had been taking medication for HIV and depression as well as an antifungal treatment when she was admitted to the jail in April 2019 for breaking her probation, according to the lawsuit, which claims her husband brought her medications to the jail but that the staff didn't give them to her for several days and failed to administer them regularly.

Less than a week after arriving at the hospital, Barlow-Austin, 47, died of meningitis, which is a swelling of membranes in the brain and spinal cord that can be caused by bacteria, viruses, fungi and other issues. [According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), people with HIV can be at higher risk for fungal meningitis. While in jail, Barlow-Austin complained of dizziness, headache and a mass in her neck, according to the complaint.

“What happened to Holly Barlow-Austin was not an isolated incident,” the lawsuit claims. “She is just the latest victim of a greedy corporate culture that sees inmates as dollar signs and puts profits over people’s lives. For years, LaSalle has been neglecting and abusing inmates, disregarding their fundamental constitutional rights, and engaging in other cruel and inhumane acts and practices. This case goes to the very heart of everything that’s wrong with the privatization of America’s county jails.”

Erik Heipt, the lawyer representing Barlow-Austin’s family, has experience with this type of case. [As The New York Times reports](#), in 2017, Heipt won a settlement in a lawsuit filed on behalf of the family of Michael Sabbie, who died in the same jail in 2015.

In 2016, Morgan Angerbauer died while in custody at the same jail. That incident resulted in jail time for a LaSalle nurse who pleaded guilty to negligent homicide.

Heipt obtained video footage of Barlow-Austin’s last two days in custody at the jail. (You can watch clips of that footage in a Gazette video that recounts a timeline of the weeks leading to Barlow-Austin’s death. The video is posted above, but be warned that you may find it disturbing.)

[Heipt told The Washington Post](#) that he viewed all the footage. “The only way I was able to know, for example, that [Holly] only had three small cups of water during 48 hours is because I watched all 48 hours,” Heipt told the newspaper. “If you look at just the medical records provided by the company, LaSalle, you would have no idea of her blindness, inability to walk, difficulty even crawling or malnourished state.”

The lawsuit names Bowie County, LaSalle Corrections and its medical director, Timothy Reynolds, and several nurse practitioners and other health care workers as defendants. The case was filed in the Texarkana Division of the Eastern District of Texas under U.S. District Judge Robert Schroeder III.