



**Commission of  
Correction**

**Final Report of the  
New York State Commission of Correction:**

**In the Matter of the Death of**

**Paul Watkins,  
an incarcerated individual of the  
Onondaga County Justice Center**

**January 25, 2023**

**To: Sheriff Tobias Shelley  
Onondaga County Sheriff's Office  
407 S. State Street  
Syracuse, New York 13202**

**Allen Riley**  
*Chairman*

**Thomas J. Loughren**  
*Commissioner*

**Yolanda Canty**  
*Commissioner*

GREETINGS:

WHEREAS, the Medical Review Board has reported to the NYS Commission of Correction pursuant to Correction Law, section 47(1)(d), regarding the death of Paul Watkins who died on December 17, 2021, as a result of circumstances which occurred while an incarcerated individual in the custody of the Onondaga County Sheriff at the Onondaga County Justice Center, the Commission has determined that the following final report be issued.

FINDINGS:

1. Paul Watkins was a 38-year-old male who died on 12/17/2021 due to a suicidal hanging while in the custody of the Onondaga County Sheriff at the Onondaga County Justice Center.
2. Watkins was born in New York. He was survived by his wife, seven children, his parents, and three brothers. Watkins was the owner of a painting business.
3. [REDACTED]
4. [REDACTED]
5. [REDACTED]. In the instance offense, on 12/9/21 at 12:46 a.m., Watkins was arrested by the Cicero Town Police and charged with Criminal Contempt 2<sup>nd</sup> Degree. During Watkins's arraignment, he was belligerent to the Judge. Watkins was remanded to the Onondaga Justice Center with \$1,500 cash bail or \$2,500 bail bond.
6. On 12/9/21 at 1:23 a.m., Watkins was admitted to the Onondaga County Justice Center by Officer J.C. for Criminal Contempt 2<sup>nd</sup> Degree. Officer J.C. performed a pat search on Watkins to check for any contraband and no contraband was found. A strip search was completed on Watkins with no contraband visualized. Watkins scored a zero on the Suicide Prevention Screening Guidelines and answered "no" to having any mental health treatment, thoughts of killing himself, or having a history of alcohol or drug abuse. Watkins was placed on general supervision that required 30-minute checks by officers.
7. [REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
8. On 12/11/21 at 5:52 p.m., Watkins made a phone call to his wife. Watkins was angry and raised his voice to his wife and told her, "I'm fucking angry dude. I'm angry that I'm in here and you're not. So, what are you going to do to help me?" Watkins's wife told him that she didn't know what to do because it was a lot, and she did not have \$2,500 to get him out of jail. Watkins stated, "Well you know what then? I'll see you next fucking year, you fucking retard". Watkins hung up the phone ending the call.
9. [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
10. On 12/13/21 at 3:37 p.m., Watkins made a phone call to his wife. Watkins was angry and asked his wife, "What was the first thing I told you to do when they hauled me away in handcuffs because you filed a fucking civil against me a year ago? What's the first thing I told you to do?" Watkins' wife answered, "Call your Lawyer". The phone call continued for an additional three minutes with Watkins yelling at his wife to get him out. The phone call ended with one of the parties hanging up the phone abruptly.
11. [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
12. On 12/15/21, Lysander Court Judge M.B. signed a temporary order of protection against Watkins to stay away from his wife and to refrain from communication or contact with her until the next court date on 12/31/21.
13. On 12/16/21 at 3:22 p.m., Correction Officer (CO) C.H. relieved CO B.E. from duty on Pod 2B. CO C.H. documented in the unit logbook that Watkins was let out of his cell for recreation from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. In a written affidavit by CO C.H., CO C.H. documented that while Watkins was out for recreation, Watkins approached the officer's desk and asked CO C.H. to look up his court date. CO C.H. looked in the computer and advised Watkins that the court date had not been updated. Watkins continued to walk around the Pod while waiting to have a scheduled video visit call. Watkins reported to CO C.H. that he was having difficulty using the machine for the video visit. One of the other incarcerated individuals assisted Watkins and Watkins was able to have the video visit. CO C.H. documented that Watkins video visit was with an unknown female and at one point CO C.H. heard Watkins raise his voice while talking to the female, and then Watkins hung up ending the video call.
14. At 4:40 p.m., Watkins's recreation time ended and he was locked back in his cell. CO C.H. documented continuing his tours approximately every 30 minutes and at one point, Watkins had papers on the floor in front of his cell. Watkins asked CO C.H. to open his cell door so he could collect the papers. CO C.H. opened Watkins's cell door and Watkins picked up the papers and returned to his cell. CO C.H. documented that at 9:15 p.m., while walking around the Pod, Watkins was standing at his cell door and Watkins called out for CO C.H. CO C.H. responded to Watkins and Watkins said that he didn't feel well, and he wanted to be seen by medical because he felt like he was going to faint. CO C.H. immediately contacted medical to come to Pod 2B to see Watkins.

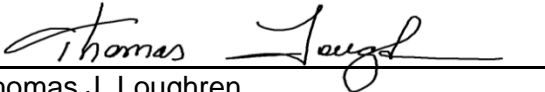
15. A review of the video call on 12/16/21 by Commission staff revealed that Watkins was talking to his mother. Watkins told his mother that his wife had not spoken to Watkins's lawyer as she had told him. Watkins told his mother that he needed money on his commissary so he could eat. Watkins told his mother that he was starving, that he wasn't getting any food, he was so hungry and starving in there. Watkins asked his mother to bail him out and she told him that she didn't have the money to bail him out. Watkins was upset that he was going to be in jail and away from his family for the Christmas holiday. Watkins told his mother that he tried to kill himself by cutting his arm. Watkins held his arm up to the video call camera but there were no visible injuries observed on Watkins's arm on the video camera. Watkins was upset over being arrested and voiced that he did nothing wrong to get arrested. Watkins told his mother, "I tried to kill myself. I cannot be in here. You have to get me out of here. If I find a sharp enough object, I'm going to stick it in my throat right now. You've got to get me out of here, I want to die in here, I want to die, I want to die right now. If I had a knife I'd slit my wrist right now, I'd cut my throat right now." Watkins's mother told Watkins that she was not going to put the house up and she was trying to hang on to the house because it was the only thing that they had left. Watkins became upset and raised his voice and told his mother, "Well keep me in here and don't bail me out mom. Don't put any money on my books either let me fucking starve". Watkins then slammed the phone on the receiver and ended the video call. After this video call, Watkins's mother did not contact the Onondaga Justice Center to alert them that Watkins had tried to cut his wrist and that Watkins voiced a plan to commit suicide if he was able to find a sharp object.
16. [REDACTED]
17. On 12/16/21 at 10:51 p.m., CO C.H. documented in the Pod 2B unit logbook that a full count was done on the unit with the use of a flashlight.
18. On 12/16/21 at 11:04 p.m., CO B.S. relieved CO C.H. from duty on Pod 2B. Documentation in the unit logbook indicated that CO B.S. completed a tour and a head count on the unit with the use of a flashlight.
19. On 12/16/21 at 11:28 p.m., CO B.S. was conducting a tour on Pod 2B with the use of a flashlight. As CO B.S. approached cell #2, he observed Watkins sitting on the left side of the lower bunk with his eyes open. CO B.S. observed a sheet tied around Watkins's neck and the other end of the sheet tied to the front right corner of the upper bunk. CO B.S. knocked on Watkins's cell door and tried to get his attention, but Watkins did not respond. CO B.S. went to the workstation to retrieve his keys and returned to Watkins's cell and entered the cell and turned the light on. CO B.S. called out to Watkins and observed that Watkins's hands looked discolored. CO B.S. immediately called for a Code Blue and cut Watkins down and positioned him on the floor and initiated

Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR). At 11:30 p.m., COs A.S. and G.W. arrived at the scene and relieved CO B.S. from chest compression. Sergeant (Sgt.) J.D. arrived with the Automated External Defibrillator (AED) and applied it to Watkins's chest. The AED was turned on and analyzed with no shock advised. At 11:31 p.m., medical staff responded to the scene [REDACTED]

ACTIONS REQUIRED:

This case be closed as a suicide.

WITNESS, HONORABLE THOMAS J. LOUGHREN, Commissioner, NYS Commission of Correction, Alfred E. Smith State Office Building, 80 South Swan Street, 12<sup>th</sup> Floor, in the City of Albany, New York 12210 on this January 25, 2023



Thomas J. Loughren  
Commissioner & Chair  
Medical Review Board

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