

Lawsuit: Utah jail inmate died after staff failed to care for her

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SALT LAKE CITY — Salt Lake County Jail nurses and guards refused to arrange medical care for an inmate who died from an infection related to gastric bypass surgery, even though she showed clear signs of serious pain and sickness in the days leading up to her death, her family alleges in a wrongful death lawsuit.

Lisa Marie Ostler, 37, of Riverton, died in April 2016 after roughly four days in the jail, her family alleges. Jail employees violated Ostler's right to due process and were unnecessarily harsh to the point that they broke Utah law, Rocky Anderson, the family's attorney, argues in the lawsuit filed Thursday in U.S. District Court.

"Our daughter died a very painful death from a medical cause that was not related to drugs. And they couldn't get beyond looking at it as a drug event to get her any kind of help," her father Calvin Ostler told reporters Thursday.

A proper medical evaluation would have determined Ostler needed care and prevented her death, but that never happened, the suit alleges. Ostler's parents said Thursday their daughter was manager at a bank and a credit card company, but she became dependent on painkillers after the surgery and developing Crohn's disease, an inflammatory bowel disease. She later turned to heroin after losing her insurance, they said.

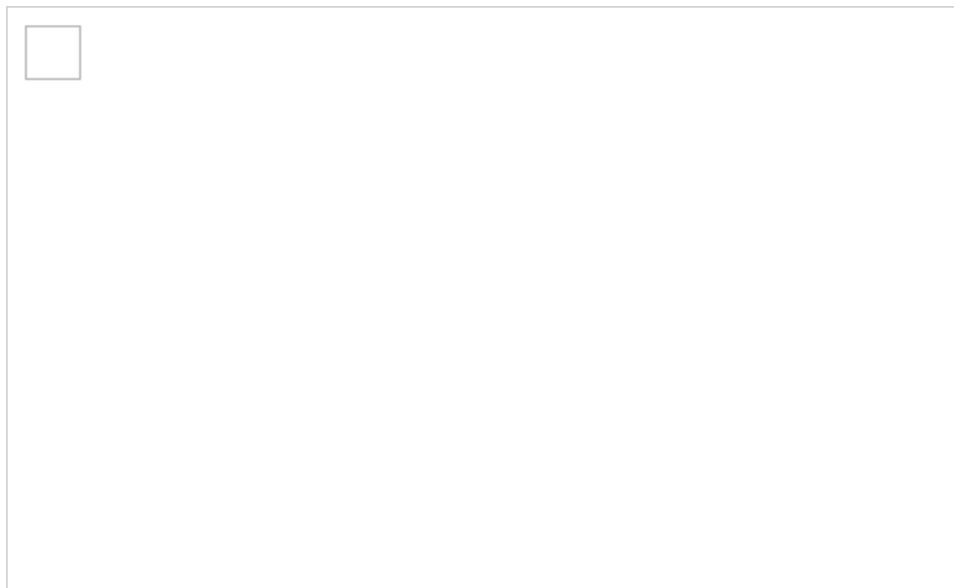
Ostler was being held in the jail in advance of a scheduled court appearance for drug charges.

The lawsuit seeks unspecified damages for the suffering Ostler's parents say she endured, plus funeral and medical expenses, her family's distress, attorney fees and other losses. Ostler leaves behind three children, ages 7, 12 and 14, according to the suit.

The lawsuit names former Salt Lake County Sheriff Jim Winder, chief deputy Pam Lofgreen, jail medical director Todd Wilcox, and several jail employees. It contends the employees and the leaders of the jail violated Ostler's constitutional rights and were unnecessarily harsh.

Utah County Sheriff's Sgt. Kevin Hunter said the sheriff's office "does not comment on active lawsuits." Winder, now Moab's police chief, declined to respond, saying he had not yet spoken with the Salt Lake County District Attorney's Office.

Ostler's family alleges she showed "obvious signs of excruciating pain" from peritonitis — inflammation of lining of the abdominal organs — but jail employees disregarded them.



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"It's torture," said Kim Ostler, her mother.

Other inmates could hear Ostler yell, moan and curl up in a ball, and noticed she hadn't eaten for two days, showing clear signs of dehydration before she was pronounced dead at a hospital in the early hours of April 3, 2016, the suit alleges.

On March 30, the day Ostler arrived at the jail, an employee filled out paperwork noting she had several medical issues and took medications, including one to treat Crohn's disease.

A fellow inmate asked a guard to call for medical help, but the guard said Ostler was "coming down off drugs," and told Ostler, "I'll bet it feels like you're going to die, doesn't it? Just a couple more days."

Ostler repeatedly pushed an alarm button to call for help, her family said, but a guard told her to stop.

Other inmates prodded guards to give Ostler care over two days, reporting she was yelling and crying, with one checking on Ostler to find she appeared to have stopped breathing. Jail employees did CPR and an ambulance brought her to a hospital, where she was declared dead, her family said.

An autopsy found she died of the inflamed abdominal lining from a rupture at the site of the gastric surgery, and her Crohn's may have exacerbated the problem.

The Ostlers said they want the jail to reform how it handles inmates' medical issues and possibly create a civilian review board to evaluate the jail.

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