Family of dead Orleans Parish Prison inmate questions jail's m response

Naomi Martin, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune
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wardel-taylor.jpg

OPP inmate Wardel Taylor, 36, died Thursday of an apparent heart attack, according to the Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office. Wardel's family said they were concerned he died because he did not receive medical attention quickly enough after he collapsed in his cell.

(Photo by Photo provided by Angelia Williams)

Family members of a 36-year-old Orleans Parish Prison inmate who died of an apparent heart attack this week said on Friday they are concerned the death was due, in part, to a slow response from jail authorities. The Sheriff's Office said in a statement that Wardel Taylor collapsed on his tier on Thursday and received "immediate" medical attention from the sheriff's medical staff and New Orleans EMS.

"We want to know the facts of what happened," said Taylor's 30-year-old sister, Danchell Davis.

Taylor's girlfriend, Angelia Williams, who works as a nurse, said Taylor had suffered from high blood pressure. She said she was concerned that too much time had passed between the time he collapsed in his cell and the time he received medical attention because inmates had no way to notify prison guards of an emergency.

"If when he passed out, they were able to pick up a phone or press a button or something or let somebody know, 'Hey, there's a problem,' he could've been saved," Williams said. "If he'd had

immediate medical attention, he'd still be alive.

"Based upon what he has told me, someone else was up there sick and by the time someone came it was hours after," she said. "When the guys would get into a fight it was a long time before somebody came up. If the inmates didn't break it up, it wouldn't get broken up. When (a guard) makes a round it's hours before somebody comes back."

Williams said she last spoke to Taylor on Thursday about 9:15 a.m., which happened to be his birthday. He sounded "in good spirits," she said.

The Southern Poverty Law Center, which has sued the sheriff over alleged unconstitutional conditions at the jail, is looking into the death.

According to a statement released by Dr. Samuel Gore, the jail's medical director, Taylor was taken to Interim LSU Public Hospital where he was pronounced dead. The Sheriff's Office did not immediately respond to requests regarding the time of the guards' rounds, the time the inmate's medical response began and the time of his death.

Taylor, who also went by the name Kevin Taylor, had served a 15-year sentence for a 1996 case involving possession of crack cocaine with intent to distribute. Before he was released, however, authorities detained him on a warrant in connection with the aggravated rape of a then-young girl, an allegation his girlfriend said he denied. He was being held in lieu of a $1 million bond and was scheduled for trial in that case in May.

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