THE LENS
FOCUSED ON NEW ORLEANS AND THE GULF COAST

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Death in New Orleans jail this summer was an overdose, coroner determines

by **NICK CHRASTIL**
OCTOBER 27, 2021



The Orleans Justice Center. (Michael Isaac Stein/The Lens)

A man who **died over the summer** in the New Orleans jail overdosed on fentanyl, Orleans Parish Coroner Dwight McKenna determined last month.* Anthony Hunt was 37 years old when he died on June 22. He had been in jail for less than 2 weeks, pending an extradition to Mississippi.

The determination comes weeks after court monitors appointed to evaluate the conditions of the jail as part of a federal consent decree put out a report saying contraband and drug use in the facility continues to be an issue they are concerned about.

"The number of overdoses linked to illicit drugs and prescription medication continues to be high," **the report reads**.

Emily Washington, an attorney with the Roderick and Solange MacArthur Justice Center who represents people incarcerated in the jail in the consent decree litigation, said that Orleans Parish Sheriff Marlin Gusman, along with the jail's contracted medical provider, Wellpath, need to take stronger steps to make sure contraband doesn't enter into the facility.

"Weapons and drugs continue to pose an urgent threat to everyone imprisoned in the Orleans jail," Washington said. "Deplorably, Anthony Hunt is not the first person to lose his life from outside drugs. We worry deeply that he won't be the last unless OPSO and Wellpath take more serious and concentrated action to eliminate such contraband and to keep people in their care safe."

Hunt is the only person who has died in custody at the jail so far this year, and his death fell outside the scope of the most recent monitor's report, which covered the period between October 1, 2020, and March 31 of this year. Last year, however, there were three deaths in the facility — the most since 2017. One of those was an overdose as well.

Hunt, who was a suspect in a Mississippi murder case, was arrested in June 2020, following a standoff with New Orleans police. According to a **report from WGNO**, Hunt barricaded himself in a hotel on Tulane avenue while making threats to harm himself prior to being taken into custody by U.S. Marshalls and NOPD.

When Hunt died, the Sheriff's Office put out a press release, saying he had been "found unresponsive in his cell during roll call," before he was revived and transferred to the University Medical Center. He subsequently passed away at the hospital. According to the release, the preliminary diagnosis from UMC was "cardiac arrest," and there was no indication

of foul play or self-harm.

No subsequent information has been released by the Sheriff's Office since Hunt's death. Blake Arcuri, an attorney for OPSO, said on Tuesday, in response to a public records request, that an internal investigation is ongoing.

A spokesperson for the Sheriff's Office declined to provide a comment.

The coroner's cause of death determination was completed on Sept. 30. In response to questions from The Lens about why it took over three months to produce an autopsy report, a spokesperson for the Coroner's Office said that an "average case takes a little over two months to complete" but that "sometimes they take longer for reasons that I am unfamiliar with."

Part of the reason for continued drug use at the facility, according to the monitor's report released earlier this month, is the lack of adequate supervision of detainees. The report notes that staff do not consistently **conduct security rounds**, mandatory posts were **sometimes left unstaffed**, and that required **monthly shakedowns** were not performed in "substantial compliance" with the consent judgement.

"The review of contraband reports clearly indicates reoccurring issues," the **report reads**. "There continues to be a serious issue of inmates hoarding medication. … Reports and the site visit reveal that inmates are smuggling in marijuana and hallucinogens to smoke."

Some drugs are both being sent through the mail, the monitors say, but staff smuggling contraband into the facility is a "significant issue."

"This indicates the need to analyze the data and develop a corrective action plan to reduce, if not stop, the hoarding of medication, the fashioning of weapons, and the flow of contraband into the facility," the report says.

Contraband incident reports increased in 2020 from 2018 and 2019 numbers, despite the fact that the jail population has significantly decreased.

The report also notes that timeliness and quality of death investigations is a concern to the monitors.

“The three most experienced investigators resigned in 2020 and the lack of experience of those replacing them was evident in the quality of the death investigations initially done by the new investigators,” the **report reads**.

The report was the first to evaluate the jail since Sheriff Marlin Gusman took over day-to-day operations of the facility in November of last year. Prior to that, the jail was being run by a compliance director — a position that was **created in 2016** as part of an agreement between the Sheriff’s Office, the United States Department of Justice, and civil rights lawyers representing people incarcerated at the facility in the consent decree litigation. Attorneys with the DOJ and for the detainees said that the jail conditions were continuing to deteriorate under Gusman’s watch.

But in August 2020, a federal judge ruled that Gusman **could regain control of the facility**. He officially took over full control on November 27, 2020.

**Correction: An earlier version of this story incorrectly reported the date the coroner’s report was completed. The report, provided to The Lens, was dated Oct. 25. After publication, a spokesperson for the Coroner’s Office told The Lens that represented the date it was provided to The Lens in response to a public records request. The report was actually completed on Sept. 30, the spokesperson said. (October 28, 2021)*

NICK CHRASTIL

Nicholas Chrastil covers criminal justice for The Lens. As a freelancer, his work has appeared in Slate, Undark, Mother Jones, and the Atavist, among other outlets. Chrastil has a master's degree in mass... **More by Nick Chrastil**

© 2022 THE LENS.
PROUDLY POWERED BY NEWSPACK BY AUTOMATTIC

OFFICE OF THE CORONER
ORLEANS PARISH
DWIGHT MCKENNA
3001 Earhart Blvd. , New Orleans, LA 70125

504-658-9660 Fax: 504-658-9674

DWIGHT L. MCKENNA, M.D.

CORONER'S REPORT

(pursuant to R.S. 44:19 (E)(3))

I, Dwight McKenna, CORONER FOR THE PARISH OF ORLEANS, certify the following report of death:

REPORTED NAME OF DECEASED:	Hunt, Anthony
ADDRESS:	[redacted]
SEX:	Male
DATE AT BIRTH:	Sep 19, 1983
AGE AT DEATH:	37 years 9 months 3 days
RACE:	African American / Black
DATE AND TIME OF DEATH:	Jun 22, 2021 at 10:01
PLACE OF DEATH:	UMC 2000 Canal Street New Orleans LA, 70112
DATE AND TIME OF AUTOPSY:	Jun 24, 2021 at 08:00
CAUSE(S) OF DEATH:	Toxic Effects of Fentanyl / Acetyl Fentanyl
MANNER OF DEATH:	Accident

DWIGHT MCKENNA
CORONER, ORLEANS PARISH

DATE: **November 20, 2024**

R.S. 44:19 (E)(3)

(3) A coroner's report is a document that includes the name of the decedent, address, sex, date of birth, age, and race of the decedent, date and time of death, place of death, date and time of autopsy, when applicable, and the cause and manner of death, including any scientifically contributing factors. The coroner's report is a public record, and the coroner or his designee shall release this report to the news media, any other person, the Department of Children and Family Services, when appropriate, the spouse, parent, sibling, child, grandchild, niece, nephew, aunt, or uncle of the decedent, or to the person with the right to control and authorize the interment of the decedent as provided in R.S. 8:655(A). However, nothing in this Paragraph shall authorize the release of the information set forth in this Paragraph prior to notification of the next of kin of the deceased unless no next of kin can be determined or, despite reasonable efforts by the coroner's office, no next of kin can be located. The provisions of this Paragraph shall not require the release of information in non-coroner cases, nor shall it prohibit the coroner from releasing information pursuant to R.S. 13:5713 or Children's Code Article 609 to the Department of Children and Family Services.

LCLE – DEATH IN CUSTODY REPORTING ACT

The Death in Custody Reporting Act of 2013 requires states that receive allocations under specified provisions of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 to report certain information regarding the death of any person in law enforcement custody. This may include individuals who are detained, arrested, en route to incarceration, or incarcerated in state or local facilities or a boot camp prison.

Reporting deadlines are listed below. However, you may complete the form any time during the quarter in which a death occurred, instead of waiting until due date.

Program Reports Due	Reporting Period	Quarter
January 10	October 1 – December 31	1st
April 10	January 1 – March 31	2nd
July 10	April 1 – June 30	3rd
October 10	July 1 – September 30	4th

If you have any questions or issues completing this form, please contact Linda Gautier at 225.342.1703.

Agency Name *

Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office

Contact Name *

Michael (First) Laughlin (Last)

Contact Phone Number *

(504)-202-9217

Contact Email *

laughlinm@opso.us

Reporting Year *

2021

Select the Reporting Period *

- ○ 1st Quarter: October 1 - December 31
- ○ 2nd Quarter: January 1 - March 31
- ◉ 3rd Quarter: April 1 - June 30
- ○ 4th Quarter: July 1 - September 30

Decedent Information



– DEATH IN

Middle Name

R

Last Name *

Hunt

Gender *

- (●) 1. Male
- ( ) 2. Female
- ( ) 3. Other gender identity

Race (Select all that apply) *

- [ ] 1. American Indian or Alaska Native
- [ ] 2. Asian
- [x] 3. Black or African American
- [ ] 4. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- [ ] 5. White
- [ ] 6. Unknown

Ethnicity *

- ( ) 1. Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin
- (●) 2. Not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin
- ( ) 3. Unknown

Birth Year (YYYY) *

1983

If unknown, please enter "9999"

Date of Death *

06/22/2021

Time of Death *

10:00

Location of Death - Location Name (if not applicable, enter N/A) *

University Medical Center New Orleans

This could be the name of a facility, place of business, or other designation for the location of death.

Location of Death - Street Address *

2000 Canal Street

Location of Death - City *

New Orleans

Location of Death - State *

LA

Zip Code *

causing the death did not occur in one of the facilities listed below, please use the "None of the above" answer choice. *

- (●) 1. Municipal or county jail
- ( ) 2. State prison
- ( ) 3. State-run boot camp prison
- ( ) 4. Contracted boot camp prison
- ( ) 5. Any state or local contract facility
- ( ) 6. Other local or state correctional facility (to include any juvenile facilities)
- ( ) 7. None of the above

Please list the name of the department or agency that detained, arrested, or was in the process of arresting the deceased. *

New Orleans Police Department / US Marshals Service

Please indicate the manner of death (Mark only one). *

- ( ) A. Execution
- (●) B. Accident
- ( ) C. Death attributed to use of force by a law enforcement or corrections officer
- ( ) D. Homicide (e.g., an incident between two or more incarcerated individuals resulting in a death)
- ( ) E. Natural causes
- ( ) F. Suicide
- ( ) G. Unavailable, investigation pending
- ( ) H. Other

Please provide a brief description of the circumstances leading to the death (e.g., details surrounding an event that may have led to the death, the number and affiliation of any parties involved in an incident, the location and characteristics of an incident, other context related to the death, etc.). *

Inmate Hunt was discovered unresponsive in his cell. Inmate Hunt was transported to the hospital where he ultimately expired. The Coroner's Office determined the cause of death as "Accidental" due to an overdose on Fentanyl.

228 of 5000 max characters.

Submit

WordPress Theme | Square by HashThemes