

State of Connecticut
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL



Report Concerning Ashley Morin Who Died on August 24, 2024
While in the Custody of the Department of Correction

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Inspector General

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Connecticut Department of Correction, Security Division

Connecticut State Police

Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, Division of Scientific Services

Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

INTRODUCTION

On August 24, 2024, at approximately 9:10 a.m., at York Correctional Institution, 200 West Main Street, Niantic CT, Ashley Morin¹ was found unresponsive in her cell. Lifesaving efforts were attempted but unsuccessful and she was pronounced dead at 9:42 a.m. As required by statute², the Office of Inspector General (OIG) investigated this in-custody death. The results of this investigation are contained in this report.

The investigation establishes that Morin died of a drug overdose due to the combined effects of fentanyl, chlordiazepoxide, and xylazine. Although smuggling, distribution, and possession of narcotics in a correctional institution are all crimes in Connecticut, the investigation did not develop sufficient evidence to support a prosecution.

INVESTIGATION

Department of Correction

Ashley Morin

On July 30, 2024, Ashley Morin gave birth at Bristol Hospital. The method of childbirth was via a caesarean-section. On August 19, 2024, Bristol police arrested Morin for Violation of a Protective Order. (§53a-223). At that time, she complained that she had been assaulted by her boyfriend. Unable to post the \$10,000 bond set on her case, Morin was remanded to the custody of the Department of Correction (DOC) and entered York Correctional Institution on August 19, 2024. At the York CI Medical Unit, Morin tested positive for alcohol and cocaine. She denied remembering taking cocaine but admitted drinking heavily since the birth – to the point of blacking out. Medical Unit staff noted that she was in alcohol withdrawal and started detoxification using Librium (Chlordiazepoxide).

The medical staff also treated the C-section wound. They administered anesthesia, cleaned the wound, and conducted daily wound checks. Morin was initially assigned to 4-South cell #10 from August 19th to August 23rd. On August 23rd she moved to 4-South cell #26.

¹ On August 24, 2024, Ashley Morin was a 32-year-old African American female.

² General Statutes §51-277a(a)(2)(B) provides, “... whenever a person dies in the custody of the Commissioner of Correction, the Inspector General shall investigate and determine whether the deceased person may have died as a result of criminal action, and, if so, refer such case to the Chief State’s Attorney or a state’s attorney for potential prosecution.”

Discovery on August 24, 2024

On August 24, 2024, at approximately 9:08 a.m., Corrections Officer Joshua DiMassa was working at 4-South. Upon hearing loud, excessive, and repeated banging on a door, CO DiMassa went to cell #26. There he saw Inmate #3 and Inmate #4 screaming and crying, stating that their cellmate, Ashley Morin, was lying in her bed unresponsive. CO DiMassa looked in the cell window and saw Morin. He asked if she was okay and received no response. He then went to the nurse's station and returned to cell #26 with Registered Nurse Tina Eldridge. The cell door was opened and the two inmates removed. CO DiMassa then called a Code White (medical emergency) and notified control to activate 911.

Medical staff began CPR at 9:16 a.m. after moving Morin from her bunk to the floor. Thereafter, ambulance EMTs and Lawrence and Memorial Paramedic Jeffrey Douchette arrived on scene. They continued performing CPR until 9:42 a.m. when Douchette pronounced Morin deceased.

DOC officials notified the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) and the Connecticut State Police (CSP) of the in-custody death. CSP Troopers and an OCME investigator responded to York C.I.

The DOC Security Division conducted a video review of cell #26. Morin was last seen on video entering cell #26 on August 23^d at 8:56 p.m. The video confirmed that all 15-minute inspection tours were completed until the Code White was called by CO DiMassa. The video showed that at 9:08:26 a.m., CO DiMassa walked to cell #26, looked into the cell, and then walked away to the nurse's station. At 9:09:17 a.m., CO DiMassa and RN Eldridge walked to cell #26 and opened the door. At 9:10:13 a.m., additional medical staff arrived at cell #26 as the Code White had already been called.

Phone Call

On August 24, 2024, DOC Officer Adam Dembinski reviewed the four phone calls that Ashley Morin had made during the 48 hours prior to her death. During these calls, Morin did not exhibit signs of depression or thoughts of self-harm.

According to Officer Dembinski's review, on August 23, 2024, at 6:36 p.m., Morin tells a male that she was offered fentanyl when she was in the cell she was housed in prior to being moved to another cell due to the medical issues with her C-section. Morin had been in cell #10 before being moved to cell #26.

Officer Dembinski relayed this information to Warden Trina Sexton who ordered a shakedown of cell #10. A recording of the phone call was saved, burned to a disk, and delivered to the Security Division.

Search of Cell #10

Correction Officer Lisa Hodges responded to unit 4-South to assist in the shake-down of cells. While searching cell #10, CO Hodges found a tobacco-like substance mixed with a white powdery substance on the bunk of Inmate #2. This item was turned over to Correction Officer Nicholas Beers at 11:40 a.m.

CO Beers tested the recovered substance using a Sirchie Nark II Presumptive Narcotic Test. According to CO Beers' report, the substance tested positive for fentanyl. The substance was subsequently given to the CSP for further analysis and evidence retention.³

Connecticut State Police

Connecticut State troopers from Troop E as well as detectives from the Eastern District Major Crime Squad (EDMCS) responded to York Correctional Institution to investigate the death of inmate Ashley Morin. They learned that DOC staff had listened to recorded phone calls made by Morin since her intake at York CI on August 19, 2024. The DOC staff reported that, during a call on August 23, 2024, Morin said that her bunkmates in cell #10 had offered her fentanyl before she was moved to cell #26 for medical reasons. Based on the phone call, DOC staff conducted a systematic search of Building 4-South cell #10 and discovered suspected narcotics on a bunk assigned to Inmate#2. A field test by DOC staff yielded a presumptive result that the substance was fentanyl.

Cellmate Interviews

Troopers interviewed Morin's former cellmates from cell 10, Inmate #2 and Inmate #1. These interviews may be summarized as follows:

³ A test of the recovered substance by the State Forensic Laboratory was negative for the presence of controlled substances. See infra.

Inmate #1

Inmate #1 stated that she was transferred to York CI the same day as Morin. They were in cell #10 together for a few nights with another inmate named [Inmate #2]. There were no problems among them and no drug use that she saw or knew about.

Morin told Inmate #1 that she was at York CI because of something that had happened with her boyfriend and that recently he was physically abusive to her. Morin said that she had a baby recently and had a wound related to a C-section. Morin told Inmate #1 that the physical abuse from her boyfriend caused the wound to open and complicated the healing process. Inmate #2 said that Morin appeared to be in pain from the wound. She was getting assistance from the medical staff, but she was still uncomfortable.

Morin was moved on Friday August 23rd and Inmate #1 had not seen her since. The night before she was moved, Morin did not seem right. Inmate #1 did not know what it was, but she seemed off. Morin never mentioned anything about drug use, only that she was an alcoholic.

When Inmate #1 was told that Morin was deceased, Inmate #1 was surprised and upset. She could offer no explanation.

Inmate #2

Inmate #2 stated that she and Morin were brought to York CI together on August 19, 2024, but it was not until August 21, 2024, that they were assigned to cell #10, that they shared with Inmate #1. They were together until August 23rd when Morin was transferred to another cell. Inmate #2 denied any issues during their short time together.

Inmate #2 learned that Morin had an injury to her abdomen from a recent caesarean section surgery. Inmate 2 could tell that Morin was in pain and uncomfortable. Morin said that she had stitches that had split open and were bleeding. In an attempt to help, Inmate #2 and Inmate #1 gave Morin extra "pads" given them by the girl who hands out food trays. Inmate #2 believed that Morin was taking Motrin for the pain but was unable to get any during the evening/night hours because the doctors were only there during the day. Inmate #2 said that Morin did not take any drugs.

On Saturday, August 24, 2024, corrections officers did a room search and told Inmate #2 that suspected fentanyl was found on her bunk. Inmate #2 denied any knowledge of drugs in

her cell. She said that earlier in the morning she had received a small packet of what she thought was instant coffee, powdered creamer, and sugar from another inmate whom she described as “a young blond girl from cell 6.” She acknowledged that she is taking methadone because she has an addiction to fentanyl based on her use prior to her incarceration.

EDMCS detectives interviewed Morin’s cell #26 cellmates, Inmate #3 and Inmate #4. Those interviews may be summarized as follows:

Inmate #3

Inmate #3 arrived at York CI on August 23, 2004, at approximately 6:00 p.m. She was brought to the processing area and, around 11:00 p.m., was brought to the Medical Unit. At approximately 11:15 p.m. she was brought to cell #26. Her roommates were Morin and Inmate #4.

When she got into the room, Inmate #3 talked with Morin for a little while until Inmate #3 fell asleep. Inmate #3 slept on a “boat” on the floor of the cell. Morin and Inmate #4 slept on the bottom bunks of their bunk sets. Inmate #3 woke up the morning of August 24th when breakfast was being delivered (6:00 a.m.). Both of her cellmates were still sleeping. Inmate #3 noticed that Morin was sleeping mostly on her stomach and had her hand on the bunk ladder. Inmate #3 ate her breakfast and went back to sleep. She woke up at 9:00 a.m. and Inmate #4 was walking around the cell. Morin was in the same position that she was at 6:00 a.m. They touched Morin and she was cold to the touch. They tried to wake Morin by shaking her, but it did not work. Inmate #3 then banged on the cell door to notify a correction officer. When the officer came, Inmate #3 told him that she thought Morin was dead. Officers then came and removed Inmate #3 and Inmate #4.

From talking with Morin the previous night, Inmate #3 believed that Morin seemed happy and did not make any suicidal statements. Inmate #3 learned that Morin had had a baby three weeks ago and had an infected C-section. Morin did not mention any drug use to Inmate #3 only an issue with alcohol. Inmate #4 also did not mention drug use to Inmate #3.

Inmate #4

Inmate #4 had been at York CI for twenty-seven days and since her arrival had been held in cell #26 in the Medical Unit. On August 23, 2024, Ashley Morin was moved into the cell during the day. Inmate #4 learned that Morin had a baby three weeks ago and was caring for her C-section wound by herself. Morin was at York CI due to issues with her abusive boyfriend.

Morin told Inmate #4 that she had issues with alcohol but never mentioned anything about drugs. On August 23rd around 11:00 p.m., another person (Inmate #3) was moved into cell #26. Inmate #4 did not know much about her.

Inmate #4 was asleep when Inmate #3 was moved into the cell and woke up when she was setting up her bed. Inmate #3 talked to Morin for a while. During the night, Inmate #4 woke up and went to the bathroom. She noticed that Morin was resting her head on her hand which was holding the bottom rung of the bunk ladder. Inmate #4 thought she was sleeping peacefully and went back to sleep. Inmate #4 slept through breakfast the next morning (August 24th). When Inmate #4 woke up, she saw Morin's legs were sticking out of the bed sheet and her head/hand position was the same as before. Inmate #4 went to move her sheet to cover her legs and felt that her legs were cold. Inmate #3 said that she had already touched Morin and noticed that she was cold. Inmate #4 told Inmate #3 to bang on the cell door until a correction officer arrived. When the first correction officer arrived, he came into the cell, touched Morin, and yelled down the hall to call 911.

Inmate #4 stated that Morin never made statements about wishing to harm herself and was unaware of any issues that Morin may have had with other inmates.

Additional Investigation

In addition to conducting the cellmate interviews, the trooper assigned to the case followed up on the investigative leads provided by the DOC.

Recorded Phone Call

Detective Justin Clachrie reviewed the recorded phone call made by Ashley Morin on August 23, 2024, at 7:10 p.m.⁴ Detective Clachrie's report states:

"During the phone call, Morin spoke to a male about bond money. She complained about the conditions there, including her former cell mates (presumably those from Cell #10), whom she said were smoking something she thought was fentanyl. However, despite what was reported on the day of the incident, I did not hear Morin mention being offered drugs by any other inmates. Because of the activities and behaviors exhibited by her previous cell mates (presumably Cell #10), Morin explained how she exaggerated her c-section wound, stating that

⁴ The DOC describes this call as having occurred on August 23, 2024, at 6:36 p.m. Despite this discrepancy, I am convinced that it is the same recorded phone call as reviewed by Detective Clachrie.

she “milked it,” in order to get moved out of that room for medical reasons. She appeared to like her new cell mates, presumably those in Cell #26, and did not mention any issues with them.”⁵

Complaint to Bristol Police Department

On August 18, 2024, the Bristol Police Department investigated a third-party report that Morin and her boyfriend had an argument. Officers observed Morin and her boyfriend sitting in a public area. Both had “no-contact” protective orders protecting them from each other. The two were arrested. During the booking process, Morin complained that her boyfriend had assaulted her the previous day (August 17, 2024). She reported that he slapped her in the face and, later that same day, he choked her. Morin pointed to a cut on her neck that she said was from the assault. Upon examination by the investigating officer and EMS, they concluded that the injury appeared to have been sustained prior to the alleged incident with Morin’s boyfriend.

After obtaining a statement from Morin, a Bristol PD officer interviewed Morin’s boyfriend who was also in police custody at that time. The boyfriend denied the allegations and stated that Morin had a “lot of psychological issues on top of being an alcoholic.” He said that he never touched or threatened Morin.

Bristol PD closed the case based on insufficient probable cause to arrest.

Laboratory Report

Detective Clachrie sent the suspected fentanyl seized by the DOC from cell #10 to the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, Division of Scientific Services for analysis. On February 3, 2025, Detective Clachrie received the laboratory report pertaining to the requested analysis. The laboratory report indicated that the submitted item was examined using gas chromatography/mass spectrometry and no controlled substances were identified. The conflict between this result and the field test administered by the DOC (which was positive

⁵ I reviewed a recording of the call myself. The call is approximately 15 minutes long and mostly relates to Morin’s efforts to raise \$500 so that she could post bond. About six minutes into the call, during Morin’s complaints about the conditions at York CI, she says:

“I was in the room today. They were doing weird shit. They were trying to smoke ... I don’t know what it was ... I think it was fentanyl, like in the room. But luckily, my c-section thing, it had to be patched up a little bit.” [Morin then describes how she exaggerated her symptoms to get moved to another room.]

Based on this, I agree with Detective Clachrie’s interpretation of the call.

for fentanyl) is explained by the presumptive nature of the Sirchie Nark II test. The Sirchie website states:

“Presumptive identification is generally recognized within our legal system as a component of probable cause. There is no drug identification system in use which completely eliminates the occurrence of false positives and false negatives. A forensic laboratory is required to qualitatively and quantitatively identify an unknown substance.”

In the present case, the State forensic laboratory, using sophisticated scientific equipment, found no controlled substances in the sample from cell #10.

Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

On August 25, 2024, Chief Medical Examiner James R. Gill, M.D. performed an autopsy examination on the body of Ashley Morin. Doctor Gill’s report lists the results of his examination as:

CAUSE OF DEATH: ACUTE INTOXICATION DUE TO COMBINED EFFECTS OF FENTANYL, CHLORDIAZEPOXIDE, AND XYLAZINE

MANNER OF DEATH: ACCIDENT (SUBSTANCE USE)

The report follows the standard OCME protocol and details both the external and internal examination of the body. Of note on the external examination is a 5” healing horizontal Pfannenstiel incision that is partially dehisced.⁶ There are no external injuries noted. The internal examination noted an intact, remote gastric bypass surgery, but nothing else that was remarkable.

Samples of blood were sent to NMS Labs in Horsham, PA for analysis. The toxicology report was positive for:

Xylazine – 40 ng/mL

Fentanyl – 1.9 ng/mL

Chlordiazepoxide (Librium) – 1300 ng/mL

Nordiazepam – 75 ng/mL

⁶ This is the abdominal incision used for the Caesarian Birth. The term “dehisced” refers to the separation of a wound that was previously closed.

Xylazine is a veterinary sedative, analgesic, and anesthetic in large animals (e.g., cattle). It is also found as an adulterant in illicit drugs such as fentanyl. It is not approved for human use. According to the FDA and CDC, it is highly dangerous when combined with fentanyl. Fentanyl and xylazine have an additive effect on the central nervous system and respiratory depression that can lead to arrest and death.

Fentanyl is a prescription opioid. It is reported to be 80 to 200 times more potent than morphine. Signs of fentanyl toxicity include severe respiratory depression, muscle rigidity, seizures, hypotension, coma, and death.

Chlordiazepoxide (Librium) is a benzodiazepine used to manage anxiety and for aid in alcohol withdrawal. Nordiazepam is a metabolite of chlordiazepoxide.

FINDINGS

The investigation supports the following findings of material fact:

1. On August 19, 2024, Ashley Morin was arrested by the Bristol Police Department for violation of a protective order. Her bond was set at \$10,000. When she could not post that bond, she was remanded to DOC custody.
2. Morin entered the York Correctional Institution on August 19, 2024. She was assigned to cell #10 in the Medical Unit at Building 4-South. The York CI staff began treating her for alcohol withdrawal and a caesarean section incision she received while giving birth on July 30, 2024, at Bristol Hospital.
3. On August 23, 2024, Morin was transferred from cell #10 to cell #26. Her cellmates in cell #26 were Inmate #3 and Inmate #4. The three went to sleep during the late evening hours of August 23rd / early morning hours of August 24th.
4. On August 24th when Inmate #4 woke up, she noticed that Morin's legs were extending off of her bunk. When she attempted to cover Morin's legs with her sheet, she noticed that Morin was cold. Inmate #3 also said that when she touched Morin, she was cold. They banged on the cell door to get the attention of DOC staff.

5. At approximately 9:10 a.m., DOC staff entered cell #26 and found Morin unresponsive. They called 911 and attempted life saving measures but were unsuccessful. Morin was pronounced deceased at 9:42 a.m.

6. The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner determined that Morin's cause of death was: acute intoxication due to the combined effects of fentanyl, chlordiazepoxide, and xylazine. The manner of death was accidental (substance use).

7. DOC staff reviewed the four phone calls Morin made while at York CI and concluded that, while she was held in cell #10, her cellmates offered her fentanyl. This prompted a DOC search of cell #10 and recovery of packet of powder from a bunk in the cell. A presumptive field test of the packet was positive for fentanyl.

8. The Connecticut State Police (CSP) responded to York CI and investigated Morin's death.

9. The CSP review of the recorded phone call did not support the DOC conclusion that Morin had been offered fentanyl by her cell #10 cellmates.

10. The CSP submitted the suspected fentanyl to the Forensic Science Laboratory for analysis. The lab found that the submitted item contained no controlled substances.

LEGAL STANDARD

General Statutes §51-277a(a)(2)(B) in relevant part provides:

"... whenever a person dies in the custody of the Commissioner of Correction, the Inspector General shall investigate and determine whether the deceased person may have died as a result of criminal action, and, if so, refer such case to the Chief State's Attorney or a state's attorney for potential prosecution."

The statute does not define "criminal action," but I will apply the phrase in accord with the ordinary meaning of those words. Essentially "criminal action" means that the death was the result of conduct that violates the criminal law of Connecticut.

ANALYSIS

Ashley Morin died of a drug overdose after taking a lethal combination of fentanyl and xylazine. It was a crime to smuggle that illicit combination of drugs into the York CI, distribute them to an inmate, and possess them. I therefore conclude that Morin's death was the result of criminal action.

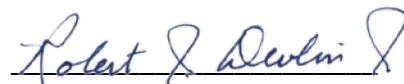
The investigation, however, provided no substantiated leads as to how Morin acquired those drugs. The evidence pointing to her former cellmates in cell #10 was refuted by (1) a review of a phone call that did not support an initial conclusion that the cellmates had offered Morin fentanyl, (2) the laboratory analysis finding that the substance seized from cell #10 initially believed to be fentanyl did not contain any controlled substances, and (3) the interviews of the cellmates all of whom denied any drug use or discussion of drugs during the relevant times.

Use of illicit drugs in the DOC is an obvious problem. Addressing this problem poses significant investigative challenges. In the present case, no credible evidence was developed as to how or when Morin obtained the drugs that killed her.

CONCLUSION

The death of Ashley Morin from a drug overdose was the result of criminal action. The investigation, however, did not yield evidence as to the identity of the person or persons who provided her with the lethal dose of fentanyl and xylazine. The Office of Inspector General will take no further action in this case.

Submitted this 25th day of June 2025


ROBERT J. DEVLIN, JR.