

State of Connecticut
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL



Report concerning the death of Jacob Evans who
was taken into custody by the Norwich Police Department
on September 15, 2024 and later died on October 1, 2024

Robert J. Devlin, Jr.
Inspector General

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 3

INTRODUCTION 4

INVESTIGATION..... 5

 JOSEPH STAPLINS 5

 LAMAR FLUKER, JR. (AKA L.A.)..... 5

 VIDEO – COMFORT INN 6

 BRICK & BASIL – JOSHUA PATERNO 6

 VIDEO – YANTIC AUTO CENTER 6

 ILLIANO’S – VINCENZO RACE..... 7

 911 CALL 7

 OFFICER MATTHEW PAGAN..... 8

 OFFICER JAVIER SANTIAGO 9

HOSPITAL RECORDS 10

AUTOPSY..... 11

FINDINGS 12

LEGAL STANDARD 13

ANALYSIS..... 14

CONCLUSION 15

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Office of Inspector General acknowledges the assistance provided to this investigation by the following:

Norwich Police Department

New London Judicial District State's Attorney's Office

Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

INTRODUCTION

On September 15, 2024, at approximately 7:45 p.m., Norwich police officers took Jacob Evans¹ into custody in order to get him medical help. While being transported by ambulance to Backus Hospital, Evans became unresponsive. Evans spent thirteen days in Backus Hospital before being transported to Yale New Haven Hospital (YNHH) on September 28th. He died at YNHH on October 1, 2024. As required by statute², the Office of Inspector General (OIG) investigated this in-custody death. The results of that investigation are contained in this report.

The investigation establishes that on September 15, 2024, at approximately 7:03 p.m., Norwich police were summoned to Illiano's restaurant, 257 West Town Road, Yantic³, Connecticut on a report of a person walking in the parking lot in need of an ambulance. Norwich Police Officers Matthew Pagan and Javier Santiago responded to the call. In an area of thick vegetation between the restaurant parking lot and the Yantic River, the officers located Evans. He was wearing only boxer shorts and was in a highly agitated state rolling around in the leaves, prickles, and dirt. The officers placed Evans in handcuffs and called for the Yantic Volunteer Fire Department (YFD). Upon the YFD arrival, firefighters along with Officers Pagan and Santiago carried Evans out of the vegetation to an awaiting ambulance.

At the hospital, Evans was diagnosed with multiple organ failure, acute kidney injury, and septic shock among other serious conditions. His urine tested positive for fentanyl, cocaine, and cannabis. A bronchoscopy showed small leaves and dirt in his airways. His prognosis was poor, and he died on October 1, 2024. The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner conducted an autopsy and determined that the cause of Evans's death was substance use, and the manner of death was accidental.

The investigation developed no evidence that the police used excessive force on Evans. He was taken into custody for his own benefit in order to safely transport him to the hospital. He was never arrested. The medical examiner did not believe that Evans' initial contact with the police was a contributing factor in his death. Other than his use of illegal drugs, the investigation did not uncover any evidence that Evans' death was the result of criminal action.

¹ On September 15, 2024, Jacob Evans was a Caucasian male, age 28.

² General Statutes §51-277(a)(2)(A), in relevant part, provides: "...[W]henver a person dies in the custody of a peace officer or law enforcement agency, the Inspector General shall investigate and determine whether physical force was used by a peace officer upon the deceased person, and if so, whether the use of force was justifiable under section 53a-22. If the Inspector General determines that the deceased person may have died as a result of possible criminal action not involving the use of force by a peace officer, the Inspector General shall refer such case to the Chief State's Attorney or a state's attorney for potential prosecution."

³ Yantic is a village within the City of Norwich, CT.

INVESTIGATION

Josh Staplins

While Evans was being treated in the hospital, his mother, Donna Dunphy, contacted the Norwich Police Department and spoke with Sergeant Avery Marsh. She told Sergeant Marsh that Evans had been at the Comfort Inn and Suites before the police encountered him. Dunphy further said that her son was with Josh Staplins. She acknowledged that Evans was probably using drugs, and she said that she had proof that Evans purchased drugs from Staplins. She also believed that Staplins stole her son's phone and Oculus (virtual reality gear).

On November 4, 2024, Detective Sergeant Kenneth Wright and Detective Christopher Nott of the Norwich Police Department interviewed Joshua Staplins at Connecticut State Police Barracks, Troop E. Staplins had been arrested and was being held in State Police custody.

Staplins stated that he was staying at the Comfort Inn and Suites in Norwich with Jacob Evans (whom he referred to as Jacob) and a person identified as "L.A." On the day of the incident, he and Jacob were driving around all day and went back to the hotel. Jacob was really high to the point where he was "moving around a lot, he gets high like that." At some point, Staplins took Jacob's car and left him and L.A. in the hotel room. Jacob was mad because Staplins took the car. When Staplins got back to the hotel room, Jacob was gone.

The arrangement he and Jacob had was that Staplins would use Jacob's car and drive him around and they would both get high together. On this day, Staplins said he did not give Jacob anything because he was "acting weird." Staplins said that he had nothing to do with Jacob's death and did not hurt him. He denied giving him drugs. Staplins said that, as far as he knows, Jacob only smokes crack and does not use any other drugs.

Staplins admitted that Jacob gave him a "game thing" four days before the incident. Jacob wanted him to sell it, and he sold it at the Game Exchange in Norwich. Staplins denied having Jacob's phone.

Lamar Fluker, Jr. (a/k/a "L.A.")

Norwich officers interviewed Lamar Fluker, Jr. on November 25, 2024. Fluker is known by the nickname "L.A."

Fluker stated that he had a room at the Comfort Inn and Suites in Norwich on 9/15/24. He was with Joshua Staplins and Jacob Evans that day, but he did not know either of them well. Fluker said that he did not remember any details because he was high. Fluker said that all they did was get high together.

Fluker stated that the manager of the hotel told him that Evans needed to leave or he would be kicked out of the hotel due to his erratic behavior. Fluker said that he was homeless at the time and needed a place to stay so he told Evans that he needed to leave.

When asked further about the incident, Fluker said that he did not remember anything due to him being under the influence of narcotics.

Video – Comfort Inn and Suites

Norwich police officers reviewed security recordings from the Comfort Inn and Suites for September 15, 2024. The following are relevant to this report:

Front Lobby Doors

6:09 p.m. – Evans enters the lobby through the front door. He is holding his back and staggering. To view this portion of the recording, click [here](#).

First Floor Elevator

6:09 p.m. – Evans is walking to the elevator holding his back. He leans against the wall. To view this portion of the video, click [here](#).

Hallway Room 512

6:20 p.m. – Evans is staggering and making strange movements. To view this portion of the video, click [here](#).

Joshua Paterno – Brick & Basil

A Norwich officer interviewed Joshua Paterno who was an employee of the Brick & Basil restaurant, 276 West Town Street. He was working on September 15, 2024. He recalled a man banging on the door of the restaurant. The man was screaming and looked like a zombie. Paterno saw the person stumble away toward Illiano's restaurant.

Video – Yantic Auto Center

A Norwich officer retrieved videos from Yantic Auto Center, 262 West Town Street. This business is across the street and slightly north of Illiano's restaurant.

Among the videos obtained, two show Evans walking south on West Town Street. Evans is stumbling and walking in an exaggerated fashion. He can be seen walking across the street and heads toward Illiano's.

To view the relevant portions of the Yantic Auto Center videos click [here](#) and [here](#).

Vincenzo Race – Illiano’s

A Norwich officer obtained a statement from Vincenzo Race, the owner of Illiano’s restaurant located at 257 West Town Street, Norwich. Race gave the following statement regarding his observations on September 15, 2024:

“On the night of the incident, I was working the counter when I heard banging at the back door. My employee opened the door and saw a man walking around the back of the restaurant. He was not walking around well and was off balance. He was yelling for water. The male was falling down and kept screaming for water. My employee got a pitcher of water and gave it to me. I gave the pitcher of water to the guy outside. The guy could not drink the water. He was spilling the water everywhere and was still very off balance. Right after he tried to drink the water, he fell down. I told him that this was not normal, and I told him I was going to call the ambulance. The guy started yelling, “Call the ambulance, call the ambulance.” He got up and started punching his own stomach over and over yelling that he had a pain in his stomach. It looked like he was in a lot of pain.

“He then started to walk to the front of the building still very off balance and he fell. A customer in his car asked me if I needed help. As I looked back towards the guy, he was gone, he disappeared. At this point, I had already called 911. I went to go look for him and started yelling for him. He yelled back to me, and I realized that he was near the river. At this time the police arrived. The police went to find him. At this point the fire department arrived and had to get him. They put him on a stretcher and brought him out of the woods.

“The guy was not acting normal, he was acting very strange and looked like he maybe was ill or on drugs, but I do not know for sure.”

911 Call

September 15, 2024

7:03 p.m.

Dispatch: Norwich 911

Vincenzo Race: I have a guy here. He needs an ambulance ... as soon as possible.
... I don’t know.

Dispatch: One minute. I’m going to transfer you to the ambulance.

Ambulance Worker: American Ambulance; the address of your emergency.

Vincenzo Race: Illiano's in Norwich. I have a guy is very weird. He walking on the parking lot here. I think he needs an ambulance. It's very ... very scare.

Ambulance Worker: You said Illiano's? Over near the industrial park?

Vincenzo Race: Yes, 257 West Town Street.

Speaking to someone else: Hey! Where you go! Come over here. Yeah, stay here please.

Ambulance Worker: Okay. And a good phone number to call you back at?

Vincenzo Race: This is my number.

Ambulance Worker: Okay, the ambulance is on the way.

To hear a recording of the 911 call, click [here](#).

Officer Matthew Pagan

On Sunday, September 15, 2024, at approximately 7:00 p.m., Officer Matthew Pagan and Officer Javier Santiago responded to 275 West Town Street to investigate a report of a suspicious male outside the business. The male was later identified as Jacob Evans.

Upon arrival, Officer Pagan was met by a worker at Illiano's restaurant who said that Evans came to the business banging on the door asking for water. Officer Pagan located Evans in the rear of the business in the woods next to a river. Evans was only wearing boxers and was screaming and rolling in the dirt. Officer Pagan's report continues:

"Evans appeared to be under the influence due to his behavior. Evans began to be highly agitated when I attempted to pick him up off the ground. Evans began to be combative by kicking his legs. Evans was placed in double lock handcuffs. I observed small lacerations on Evans' face from laying in the pricker bushes.

"Evans was transported to William W. Backus Hospital via American Ambulance.

"Upon my arrival at William W. Backus members of American Ambulance advised me Evans became unresponsive during transport.

“I contacted Willian W. Backus Hospital via telephone at 2123 hours (9:23 p.m.). I spoke to the charge nurse who advised me Evans is still intubated.”

Officer Pagan was wearing a body-worn camera (BWC) during his encounter with Jacob Evans. The recording is thirty-nine minutes long. In general, it tracks Officer Pagan as he arrives at Illiano’s restaurant and moves to the rear into thick vegetation looking for Evans. At 04:47⁴, he reaches a clearing and yelling can be heard. At 04:54, Evans is seen on the ground face down. Officer Pagan tells Evans to “Stop moving.”

For approximately the next twenty minutes, Officer Pagan and Officer Santiago are with Evans in this area of thick vegetation. Evans repeatedly goes into periods where he is thrashing about and yelling – mostly incoherently. The officers repeatedly tell Evans to relax. At 09:28, Evans yells out, “I’m dying,” and thrashes about. Officer Santiago responds, “Alright, let me get you some help.”

Despite their efforts, the officers were unable to get Evans to his feet. They continued to try to keep him on his side, “We just want you to breathe.” Throughout all of this, Evans periodically goes into episodes where he is thrashing about uncontrollably.

At 23:20, the Yantic Volunteer Fire Department arrives on scene. They were able to get Evans into a stokes basket. The firefighters together with Officers Pagan and Santiago then carried the stokes basket with Evans back to Illiano’s parking lot.

To review a representative portion of Officer Pagan’s BWC recording, click [here](#).

Officer Javier Santiago

Officer Santiago was dispatched to Illiano’s restaurant along with Officer Pagan. He proceeded into the thick vegetation behind the restaurant and reached the spot where Officer Pagan was with Evans. As reflected in Officer Pagan’s BWC (described above), Evans was in distress screaming and thrashing about. The two officers put handcuffs on Evans and tried to get him to stand up. When that did not work, they placed him on his side and waited for the fire department to arrive.

Officer Santiago’s BWC is substantially the same as Officer Pagan’s. To view the portion most relevant to this report, click [here](#).

⁴ This is elapsed time. All times noted are approximate.

HOSPITAL RECORDS

American Ambulance transported Evans to Backus Hospital arriving on September 15, 2024, at 8:02 p.m. Evans remained at Backus Hospital for thirteen days until September 28, 2024, at which time he was transported to Yale New Haven Hospital (YNHH). Upon arrival at Backus Hospital, Evans was unresponsive.

The Backus Hospital Emergency Department conducted numerous medical tests and determined that Evans suffered from hypothermia, acute kidney injury, metabolic acidemia secondary to lactic acidosis, rhabdomyolysis and toxic/metabolic encephalopathy. He was admitted to the hospital for treatment. A toxicological screen was positive for fentanyl/cocaine/cannabis, and negative for acetaminophen/salicylate/ethanol.

During his treatment at Backus Hospital, Evans was referred for a neurology consult, nephrology consult, critical care consult, infectious disease consult, and cardiology consult. The note for the critical care consult indicates acute hypoxic respiratory failure. The note for the infectious disease consult indicates septic shock, aspiration of dirt, and multiorgan failure. The bronchoscopy revealed small leaves and dirt in the airways. Evans was gravely ill and his prognosis poor.

On September 17, 2024, a CT scan revealed a suspected brain abscess. Since he could not get a brain MRI at Backus Hospital, arrangements were made to transport Evans to YNHH. After three days at YNHH, Evans was pronounced dead on October 1, 2024 at 3:59 p.m. The case note prepared by the investigator for the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner reads as follows:

“On 10/01/24 at approximately 1603 hours the OCME was notified of a death by PA Nina Fiellin of Yale New Haven Hospital. The PA reported that the decedent was transferred from Backus Hospital on 09/28/24. The decedent originally presented to Backus ED on 09/16/24. On 09/16/24, a worker at Illiano’s Grill located at 257 West Town Street in Yantic, CT reported to police that the decedent was outside the establishment, clothed in only underwear and acting suspiciously. The decedent was transported to the ED via EMS and was unresponsive upon his arrival. The decedent presented with septic shock, lactic acidosis, pneumonia, metabolic encephalopathy, and cerebral edema. The decedent underwent a bronchoscopy in which dirt and leaf matter was removed from his airway. The decedent was intubated and put on a ventilator. Results from a CT head scan were consistent with multi focal brain abscesses. The decedent underwent a right lower extremity fasciotomy. The decedent tested positive for cocaine, fentanyl, cannabinoids. The decedent developed compartment syndrome and was slated for transfer to Yale New Haven Hospital. On 09/28/24, the decedent was transported to Yale New Haven Hospital for neurosurgery management. The decedent had worsening cerebral

edema. The decedent's family opted to withdraw care, and he was transitioned to comfort measures only with no interventions."

AUTOPSY

On October 2, 2024, Associate Medical Examiner Cori Breslauer, M.D. performed the autopsy of Jacob Evans. Doctor Breslauer's report states:

FINAL DIAGNOSIS

- I. Substance Use (including Fentanyl and Cocaine)
 - A. Acute Delirium with Hyperthermia (Admission Core Temp 105°F), Agitation and Disrobing
 - B. Found by Law Enforcement in the Woods: Semi-Responsive with Aspiration of dirt
 - C. Acute Kidney Failure with Rhabdomyolysis and Metabolic Acidosis, Anamnestic
 - D. Status-Post Prolonged Hospitalization (09/16/2024 – 10/01/2024)
 - i Multimicrobial Bronchopneumonia
 - ii Acute Cerebral and Myocardial Infarcts
 - iii Ischemic Colitis, Anamnestic
 - iv Clinical Compartment Syndrome of Legs, Status- Post Fasciotomies
 - v Anasarca with Serious Ascites (Approximately 100 mL)
 - vi Jaundice of Skin and Sclerae
 - vii State 2/3 Decubitus Ulcerations: Right Buttock, Sacrum, and Right Hand
- II. Superficial Blunt Injuries of Head, Torso, and Extremities including Dermal Abrasions/ Contusions and Deep Scalp Contusion, Healing
- III. Obesity (height 72", Weight 254 pounds, Body Mass Index 34)
- IV. Coronary Artery Athrosclerosis, with 20% Stenosis of Left Anterior Descending Coronary Artery

CAUSE OF DEATH: SUBSTANCE USE (INCLUDING FENTANYL AND COCAINE)

MANNER OF DEATH: ACCIDENTAL (SUBSTANCE USE)

The report details the postmortem examination conducted by Doctor Breslauer that supports her conclusions. Although a toxicological analysis of Evans's blood was ordered, the results are not relevant to his cause of death. The blood was taken following Evans' seventeen

day stay at the hospital. In addition, Evans received many prescription drugs (including fentanyl) during his medical treatment. The relevant toxicology was from the hospital testing described above.

As part of this investigation, OIG Chief Inspector James Viadero spoke with Doctor Breslauer. She stated that Evans' initial contact with the Norwich police officers was not a contributing factor to his death which she attributed to substance use.

On March 7, 2024, I spoke to Doctor Breslauer about her findings. She explained that, in unusual cases, the use of a stimulant such as cocaine poses a risk of hyperactive delirium. This condition impairs the body's ability to control its temperature. Such high temperatures can result in brain injury due to a lack of oxygen to the brain. It also causes a delirium-based disassociation from reality and loss of the ability to control bodily functions.

Dr. Breslauer believes that this is what happened to Jacob Evans. His use of drugs on September 15, 2024, triggered hyperactive delirium. This caused an extremely high temperature (105°) affecting his ability to provide oxygen to his brain. Among other things, this condition did not allow him to protect his airway during his moving around in the thick vegetation where the officers found him. In this condition, he aspirated dirt and leaves.

During his hospital stay, Evans experienced a cascade of organ failures and other serious conditions rooted in the hyperactive delirium that was an extreme reaction to his use of cocaine. Based on my review of the hospital records, after becoming unresponsive in the ambulance, it does not appear that Evans ever regained consciousness.

FINDINGS

1. On September 15, 2024, Jacob Evans was at the Comfort Inn and Suites in Norwich with Josh Staplins and Lamar Fluker, Jr. According to Staplins, Evans was really high and moving around a lot. This was confirmed by Fluker who stated that the manager of the Inn threatened to kick Evans out due to his erratic behavior. Video from the Comfort Inn and Suites shows Evans staggering and making strange movements.
2. A person working at the Brick & Basil restaurant, 276 West Town Street, on September 15th recalled a man (Evans) banging on the restaurant's door. The man was screaming and looked like a zombie. He stumbled away toward Illiano's restaurant.
3. Video from Yantic Auto Center shows Evans walking south on West Town Street. He is stumbling and walking with an exaggerated gate. He walks across the street toward Illiano's restaurant at 275 West Town Street.

4. At Illiano's restaurant, Evans banged on the back door and asked for water. He was very off balance and upon trying to drink some water fell down. He yelled, "Call the ambulance, call the ambulance." He got up and started punching his stomach. The owner of Illiano's, Vincenzo Race, said that Evans looked like he was in a lot of pain.

5. On September 15, 2024, at 7:03 p.m., Vincenzo Race called 911 and reported that there was a person in the parking lot in need of an ambulance. As a result of this call, Norwich Police Officers Matthew Pagan and Javier Santiago were dispatched to Illiano's on a report of a suspicious male outside the business.

6. Upon arrival, the officers located Evans in an area of thick vegetation behind the restaurant. For approximately the next twenty minutes the officers tried to get Evans to cooperate with their efforts to get him help. Evans was largely incoherent, partially disrobed, and thrashing about. The officers placed him in handcuffs to control his movements. He could not stand up. Ultimately the Yantic Volunteer Fire Department arrived and removed Evans using a stokes basket.

7. During the ambulance trip to Backus Hospital, Evans became unresponsive. He arrived at the hospital at 8:02 p.m. on September 15, 2024, and remained for thirteen days. His toxicological screen was positive for fentanyl, cocaine, and cannabis. On September 28, 2024, Evans was transported to Yale New Haven Hospital. At Yale, his condition worsened, and he died on October 1, 2024.

8. The medical examiner's report documents the numerous serious medical conditions identified during Evans' extended hospital stay. These conditions were rooted in the hyperactive delirium that derived from Evans' use of cocaine. The medical examiner concluded that Evans' death was due to substance use and was accidental.

LAW

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

"... whenever a person dies in the custody of a peace officer or law enforcement agency, the Inspector General shall investigate and determine whether physical force was used by a peace officer upon the deceased person, and if so, whether the use of physical force by the peace officer was justifiable under section 53a-22. If the Inspector General determines that the person died as a result of possible criminal action not involving the use of force by a peace officer, the Inspector General shall refer such case to the Division of Criminal Justice for potential prosecution."

Neither General Statutes Chapter 886, nor the penal code define the terms “physical force” or “criminal action.” For the purposes of this report, I apply such terms in accord with their ordinary meanings.

ANALYSIS

To begin, this case poses a close question as to whether Jacob Evans’ death was an “in custody” death. The police did not restrain Evans to arrest him, or search him for weapons, or for any purpose other than to help him. He was never going to be taken to the police station. Nevertheless, I believe that when the officers placed handcuffs on Evans to facilitate his movement out of the vegetation, he was in their custody.

On September 15, 2024, Evans was experiencing a severe reaction from his use of fentanyl, cocaine, and cannabis. The people that he was staying with at the Comfort Inn and Suites noted his erratic conduct as did a worker at the Brick & Basil restaurant on West Town Street. Video of Evans at the Comfort Inn & Suites and walking on West Town Street show him acting and walking in an abnormal fashion. The owner of Illiano’s restaurant called 911 because Evans needed medical help. All of this occurred *before* Officers and Santiago arrived on scene.

The officers found Evans in an almost inaccessible area adjacent to the Yantic River. It was thick with vegetation, prickles, and dirt. Evans was lying amidst very thick foliage. He was in obvious distress. They put handcuffs on him to restrict his frantic movements. They tried to get him on his feet to walk him out of that area, but he could not stand up. They remained with him until the Fire Department arrived.

The officers did not use excessive force on Evans. They did not strike him or use a TASER⁵ on him. They did not arrest him. Their efforts were fully directed to getting this young man, who was in the throes of a drug overdose, the help that he obviously needed.

Other than his own use of illicit drugs, there was no criminality associated with his death.

⁵ On February 14, 2025, I spoke to Jacob Evans’ mother, Donna Dunphy. Ms. Dunphy stated that she found what she believed was a TASER wire and probe on Evans’ hospital bed. Based on this, I reviewed the records of the Norwich Police Department to see if there was any indication of a TASER deployment against Evans. There is no evidence that a TASER was used at any time. My review of the BWCs of the officers confirms this. In addition, a word search of the 2500 pages of records from Backus Hospital for “TASER”, “TAZER” and “Wire” yielded no results. It is highly likely that had a TASER wire been attached to Evans when he was treated at the Emergency Department, it would have been noted in his chart. Based on my inquiries, I do not believe that the object found by Ms. Dunphy was a TASER wire associated with this incident.

CONCLUSION

The death of Jacob Evans was accidental and not the result of force or criminal action. The Office of Inspector General will take no further action in this matter.

Submitted this 19th day of March 2025.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert J. Devlin, Jr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

ROBERT J. DEVLIN, JR.

INSPECTOR GENERAL