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For Immediate Release

July 3, 2024

Cache County Attorney's Office Finds No Evidence of Wrongdoing in Prison Inmate's Death

Logan, UT -- After conducting a routine Officer Involved Critical Incident review, the Cache County Attorney's Office has determined that the April 17, 2024 death of Kaden Saunders, an inmate in the Cache County Jail, was not the result of unlawful means by law enforcement personnel. The Cache County Attorney's Office is required by Utah State law, and operates pursuant to an agreement with participating law enforcement agencies and consistent with established protocols and applicable law, to perform joint investigations and independent reviews of critical incidents including police officers' use of force used in the scope of police officers' official duties. See the attached letter to Cache County Sheriff Jensen for more information.

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Dear Sheriff Jensen,

This letter addresses the April 17, 2024 death of Kaden Saunders, an inmate in the Cache County Jail. Following Mr. Saunders' death in custody, the CCSO initiated the "Northern Utah Critical Incident Investigative Team (NUCIIT) Protocol," an agreement among participating law enforcement agencies designed to ensure compliance with Utah state law for critical incident investigations under Utah Code §76-2-408. Pursuant to the protocol, an investigative task force was called in to investigate the incident. Under Utah Code 76-2-408, a "critical incident" means any of the following:

- i. an officer's use of deadly force;
- ii. an officer's use of a dangerous weapon against an individual who causes injury to any individual;
- iii. death or serious bodily injury to any individual, other than the officer, resulting from an officer's:
 - a. use of a motor vehicle while the officer is on duty; or
 - b. use of a government vehicle while the officer is off duty;
- iv. **the death of an individual who is in custody, but excluding a death that is the result of disease, natural causes, or conditions that have been medically diagnosed prior to the individual's death**

"When critical incident occurs . . . , the law enforcement agency having jurisdiction where the incident occurred [must] . . . notify the county or district attorney having jurisdiction where the

incident occurred.”¹ “[T]he chief executive of the law enforcement agency and the county or district attorney having jurisdiction where the incident occurred [must then] . . . jointly designate an investigating agency for the officer-involved critical incident.”² “The investigating agency . . . may not be the law enforcement agency employing the officer who is alleged to have caused or contributed to the officer-involved critical incident.”³

Law enforcement agencies are required to adopt policies and procedures for “select[ing] the investigating agency if an officer-involved critical incident occurs in the agency’s jurisdiction and one of the agency’s officers is alleged to have caused or contributed to the officer-involved incident.”⁴ They must also adopt “protocols . . . to ensure that any investigation of officer-involved incidents occurring in the agency’s jurisdiction are conducted professionally, thoroughly, and impartially.”⁵ To fulfill these statutory obligations and to provide mutual assistance among neighboring agencies, the sheriffs’ offices, police departments, and county attorneys’ offices in Cache, Rich, and Box Elder Counties have, through a memorandum of understanding, created the Northern Utah Critical Incident Investigative Team and adopted a Protocol to be followed in the event of an officer-involved critical incident.

Under the Protocol, the fulltime investigator employed by the Cache County Attorney’s Office becomes the Operations Section Chief for any investigation of an officer-involved critical incident, at which point the Operations Section Chief and County Attorney select a Lead Investigator. The Operations Section Chief and Lead Investigator then provide first-line management of the investigation of the officer-involved critical incident. When the investigation is complete, the Operations Section Chief and Lead Investigator turn the investigation over to the county attorney with jurisdiction.⁶ The foregoing procedures were followed in this case.

Role of the County Attorney

Once the Operations Section Chief and Lead Investigator turn the investigation over to the county attorney with jurisdiction, the county attorney then has 180 days to complete and publish

¹ Utah Code § 76-2-408(2)(a).

² Utah Code § 76-2-408(2)(b)(i).

³ Utah Code § 76-2-408(3).

⁴ Utah Code § 76-2-408(5)(a).

⁵ Utah Code § 76-2-408(5)(b).

⁶ See Utah code 76-2-408(6).

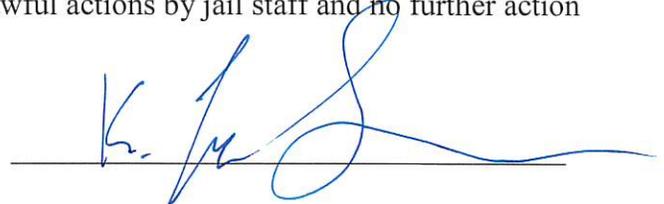
his or her findings or analyses into the “officer’s use of force”⁷ if any. I am the county attorney with jurisdiction in this case, and this report constitutes my findings and analysis regarding this officer-involved critical incident.

Findings of Fact

On April 17, 2024 at approximately 13:36 hours, Mr. Saunders returned to his room after his normally scheduled time out. Cache County Jail Staff performed multiple security check walkthroughs, at 13:41 and 14:26 hours. At 14:27 hours, Saunders sitting on the bottom bunk, put a twisted and knotted sheet of fabric over his head, and spun approximately eleven times before stopping at approximately 14:31. At 14:42 hours, staff performed a security check walkthrough and discovered Saunders in his cell in distress. Staff cut the improvised ligature and lowered Saunders down to the ground and immediately began life-saving measures. Life-saving measures continued by Cache County Staff until Logan Fire EMS arrived at 14:56 hours. At 15:42 hours, medical personnel declared the time of death. On April 18, the Medical Examiner’s Office performed a thorough autopsy and determined Saunders’ cause of death to be suicide by hanging.

Based on my review of the circumstances of this incident, there was no use of force by deputies or jail staff against Mr. Saunders that contributed to his death in custody. Previous to the incident, Mr. Saunders was allowed access to frequent medical care, and jail staff ensured access to prescribed medications. Jail staff and EMS were exemplary in their efforts to rescue and resuscitate Mr. Saunders after his self-inflicted wound. No evidence exists of any other use of force or any other means otherwise whereby Mr. Saunders could have or would have incurred trauma or other life compromising conditions. Furthermore, Mr. Saunders’ death in custody was solely the result of his own actions, and happened in spite of frequent security checks. I therefore conclude that Mr. Saunders did not die as a result of any unlawful actions by jail staff and no further action on this matter is required.

Dated this 3rd day of July 2024.



K. Taylor Sorensen
Interim County Attorney

⁷ Utah Code § 76-2-408(6).