



Four guards arrested in jail death

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Four correctional officers have been indicted on charges of reckless homicide and aggravated assault in the death of an inmate last year at the Metro Detention Facility on Harding Place.

The guards, employed by Nashville-based Corrections Corporation of America, are accused of using excessive force on Estelle Richardson on July 4, 2004, a day before she was found unresponsive in her cell.

The Nashville police and Medical Examiner's office ruled the death as a homicide, after an autopsy showed Richardson had died of a skull fracture caused by blunt trauma. She also suffered internal injuries.

Armed with a Davidson County grand jury indictment, police arrested the officers earlier this week and they all posted \$25,000 bail, according to their attorneys.

The guards — Jeremy N. Neese, 25, Keith A. Hendricks, 37, Joshua Schockman, 24, and William Wood, 27 — had been placed on administrative leave by CCA after the incident.

Attorneys for the guards said they were surprised by the arrests, but are also confident their clients will be exonerated.

"None of these four caused the death of this woman," said Neese's attorney, Paul Bruno, adding that defense attorneys have been gathering facts in the case since last year.

"This is a case where we know the facts going into it before the indictment goes down and we are very confident in our defense," he said.

Jim Price, attorney for Schockman, said he was surprised at the arrests, because he thought the case had been closed about a year ago.

"It had been referred to the United States Attorney, and when that happens, it's a possible civil rights violation, and that's not normally done unless the state closes [the case]," he said.

Davidson County Assistant District Attorney Rob McGuire said the U.S. Attorney's office had looked at the case, but added, "I think they've decided the case is more appropriately prosecuted by the state."

Bruno said Neese was completely caught off guard when officers woke him out of bed Monday morning, arrested him and took him to jail. He said Neese would have been willing to turn himself in, which the other three defendants did after they learned about Neese's arrest.

Police said that Richardson, 34, incarcerated for a probation violation, was the only inmate in her cell when she and the guards became involved in the "incident" last year.

The guardian of Richardson's two children, aged 14 and 6, filed a \$60 million wrongful death suit against CCA and the four guards. Their attorney, David Randolph Smith, said he is still collecting evidence in the civil case.

"I think I can speak for the family, they are glad the process is going forward and justice will come out however it comes out," he said.

CCA officials said they have cooperated fully with investigations and have also conducted their own probe into the incident. The company is the largest private prison operator in the United States.

Arraignment is scheduled for Wednesday in Criminal Court.

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