

Office of the Sheriff



SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

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August 25, 2025

Stacy Mezzetta de Cossio

Foreperson

2024-2025 Santa Barbara Civil Grand Jury

Grand Jury Chambers

Santa Barbara County Courthouse

1100 Anacapa Street

Santa Barbara, California 93101

**Re: Response to the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury Report Entitled
"Fatal Head Injury at the Northern Branch Jail."**

Dear Foreperson, Mezzetta de Cossio,

Enclosed, please find the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office response to the 2024-2025 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury Report entitled "Fatal Head Injury at the Northern Branch Jail."

As requested in the report, the Sheriff's Office responds to Findings 1, 2, 3 and Recommendations 3a and 3b.

Should you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me at (805) 681-4100.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bill Brown".

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Enclosure

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August 25, 2025

Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office

Response to the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury 2024-2025 Report "Fatal Head Injury at the Northern Branch Jail"

Findings and Recommendations

Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office: 60 Days

Finding(s): 1, 2 and 3

Recommendation(s): 3a and 3b

Finding 1: Because of the lack of an accurate and comprehensive master problem list in AAO's electronic health record, Wellpath medical staff did not make fully informed decisions regarding AAO's health needs and risks when he came to the Northern Branch Jail on August 29, 2024.

Sheriff's Office Response: Disagree partially with an explanation.

Although the finding correctly indicates that the master problem list could have been more comprehensive, it is misleading in that it does not account for the self-reported current drug and alcohol use the patient provided that led to the initial determination by WellPath medical staff. Had AAO provided a response to the initial assessment questions regarding his current alcohol usage with a frequency and amount that exceeded American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) guidelines, a withdrawal protocol would have been triggered along with appropriate entries made into AAO's electronic medical record and the jail management system.

Finding 2: AAO's known medical history at the jail provided clear indicators for serious alcohol withdrawal risk, but no such identification occurred.

Sheriff's Office Response: Disagree with an explanation.

The finding, again, is misleading. With the aid of hindsight, the Grand Jury has put together a narrative of "clear indicators" that were scattered amongst



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numerous intake assessments and provider notes, and coupled them with a total discounting of the patient's self-report of alcohol usage which, the Grand Jury affirms in their report, was well below the threshold of ASAM guidelines. Although this patient was monitored for alcohol withdrawal symptoms in a previous incarceration in July 2023, he had five subsequent incarcerations between July 2023 and August 2024 in which he did not meet the requirements to be placed on alcohol withdrawal protocol.

Finding 3: Custody staff were not aware that AAO had an alcohol withdrawal alert or history because it was not communicated to them by medical staff or by means of an alert in the Jail Management System, though such communication would have been valuable.

Sheriff's Office Response: Disagree with an explanation.

Although the Sheriff's Office agrees that custody staff were not aware of AAO's previous medical history when he was placed into the housing unit, there were several reasons for that:

- As the Grand Jury noted in its report, AAO was calm, cooperative, and seemingly sober at the time of his arrest.
- During his medical intake assessment, AAO denied a history of seizures and significant alcohol use.
- As noted in the Grand Jury's report, AAO's self-reported alcohol use patterns at intake during this incarceration would not meet the definition of "unhealthy alcohol use" under ASAM's withdrawal guidelines.
- AAO was ambulatory, able to participate in the booking and body scan processes, and walked unassisted from the intake area to his designated housing unit.
- Deputies reported that AAO appeared to be in good health, and that he was aware of his surroundings.

Although the Sheriff's Office agrees that monitoring for withdrawal would generally be beneficial, it is highly unlikely that it would have made any

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difference in this case. AAO was evaluated by a Registered Nurse at intake hours prior to his escorted movement to housing, where he immediately collapsed in the presence of a custody deputy.

Over the past several months, the Sheriff's Office has worked with our contracted healthcare provider to refine the process in which healthcare-related information is delivered to custody staff to be inputted into the jail management system. The Sheriff's Office is actively working with its contracted healthcare provider and jail management system provider to automate this process, which is expected to occur prior to January 1, 2026.

Recommendation 3a: The Grand Jury recommends that the Sheriff's Office require a standardized verbal communication process upon inmate handover from the registered nurse performing the health receiving screening to the relevant on-duty classification deputy, specifically requiring the sharing of health-related findings or history insofar as necessary to provide for the health and safety of the inmate or others. To be implemented by January 1, 2026.

Sheriff's Office Response: It will not be implemented with an explanation of why.

There is already a process in place that requires WellPath medical staff to inform Custody staff of health-related findings and history as it relates to alcohol withdrawal protocols and observations through the use of a medical treatment order. Had the RN determined AAO required such protocols and observations, there is nothing contained in the Grand Jury report, or within the numerous investigations and inquiries conducted in this case, that would suggest appropriate notifications would not have been made. Modifications to the existing procedures are not necessary.

Recommendation 3b: The Grand Jury recommends that the Sheriff's Office develop a comprehensive and automatic system of shared health alerts

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between the healthcare contractor's electronic health record and the Jail Management System so that critical health-related alerts appear automatically in the Jail Management System. To be implemented by January 1, 2026.

Sheriff's Office Response: Will be implemented, with an implementation schedule.

The Sheriff's Office and Advanced Technology Information Management Systems (ATIMS), our Jail Management System software provider, has been working with WellPath and CorEMR, their electronic medical record provider, to automate data sharing protocols to integrate certain healthcare and custodial data between the two systems, including alcohol withdrawal alerts. This process is anticipated to be completed before January 1, 2026.

Conclusion: The Sheriff's Office acknowledges that AAO's death was a tragic event, but believes that his incarceration was not a factor in his death. In fact, because his seizure and fall were witnessed by custody staff, he received immediate medical attention and was transported to the hospital, something that may not have occurred had he not been within the jail.