

Office of the Sheriff



SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

BILL BROWN
Sheriff-Coroner

CRAIG BONNER
Undersheriff

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140 W. Highway 246
Buellton, CA 93427
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5775 Carpinteria Avenue
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6504 Trigo Road
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Phone (805) 681-4179

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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
"Preventable Death 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 "Preventable Death at the Northern Branch Jail."

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

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

"Preventable Death at the Northern Branch Jail"

Findings and Recommendations

Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office: 60 Days

Finding(s): 1, 2, and 3

Recommendation(s): 1 and 2

Finding 1: CF repeatedly complained of abdominal pain for at least two days prior to her death, but these complaints were not assessed by medical staff in accordance with jail medical policy, procedure, and protocol.

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

Wellpath medical staff assessed the patient for complaints of pain during multiple encounters, but attributed her complaints of pain to her reported history of chronic pain and withdrawal symptoms due to her chronic opioid use. Although medical staff assessed her complaints of pain, they did not properly document those assessments including completing a focused pain assessment. As a result of the internal death review of this case, Wellpath has completed training of nursing staff regarding focused assessments for all patients complaining of pain, including patients on withdrawal protocol.

Recommendation 1: The Grand Jury recommends that the Sheriff's Office require that qualified medical professionals assess and treat pain according to accepted medical standards and in accordance with existing policy, procedure, and protocol when inmates in the County's jails complain of pain.

Sheriff's Office Response: Has been implemented, with a summary of the implementation actions taken.



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Please see the response to Finding 1. The current service contract includes provisions for the assessment and treatment of pain and is actively monitored for compliance by County Health and the Sheriff's Office.

Finding 2: Nursing staff at the Northern Branch Jail did not follow an evidence-based process to evaluate or treat CF for her abdominal pain, though such pain assessment forms were available and their use expected.

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

Wellpath medical staff did assess CF per her complaints of pain during multiple encounters, but attributed her complaints of pain to her reported history of chronic pain and withdrawal symptoms. The patient was treated for complaints of pain, but a focused evidence-based assessment was not completed. Wellpath has completed training of nursing staff regarding focused assessments for all patients, including patients on withdrawal protocol.

Recommendation 2: The Grand Jury recommends that the Sheriff's Office instruct all medical staff at the County's jails to utilize available evidence-based pain assessment forms to evaluate and document inmates' pain complaints.

Sheriff's Office Response: Has been implemented, with a summary of the implementation actions taken.

Please see response to Finding 1. The current service contract includes provisions for the assessment and treatment of pain and is actively monitored for compliance by County Health and the Sheriff's Office.

Finding 3: Inmate CF's death might have been prevented if she had received appropriate medical assessment in jail.

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

The circumstances surrounding CF's death involved a complex and complicated set of circumstances. It is important to understand that the Grand Jury's investigation and report were conducted and prepared with 20/20 hindsight that the Wellpath medical staff did not have.

Regardless of whether or not evidence-based medical assessments were performed, the results could have still been misinterpreted as being related to CF's chronic pain and opioid withdrawal symptoms. Accordingly, this finding is highly speculative. Although CF might have survived if she had received a focused pain assessment in jail, one could also speculate that she might not have.

In any event, CF's death was tragic on many levels. The Sheriff's Office and Wellpath, in partnership with County Health and Behavioral Wellness, always conduct thorough reviews of in-custody deaths and other significant events in an effort to identify improvements to processes, policies and procedures in order to provide the best possible healthcare. During these reviews, all parties develop corrective action plans to implement any necessary changes to processes, policies and procedures.