



BUCKS COUNTY Courier Times

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Inmates monitoring inmates



Bucks County started its inmate monitoring program more than 30 years ago. In a lawsuit filed last year, a mother alleges the use of inmate monitors contributed to her daughter's death.

By **JO CIAVAGLIA**
STAFF WRITER

Bucks County appears to be one of the few Pennsylvania counties that pays prisoners to monitor sick or suicidal inmates, but little is known about the decades-old program that has been named in a wrongful-death lawsuit involving a female inmate who died during heroin detoxification.

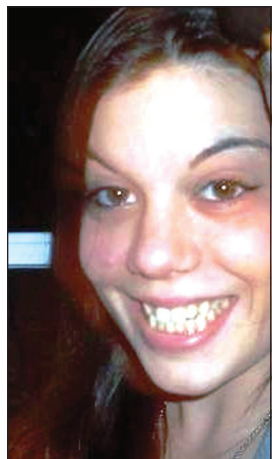
The federal lawsuit prompted this news organization to look into the practice of inmate monitoring, only to find after months of research and interviews that little public information exists about such programs in county prisons in Bucks or elsewhere.

The data that was found shows the practice varies by local laws and agency policies, according to prisoner advocates and trade groups representing prisons. There are no federal standards or guidelines for such monitoring programs, including inmate selection and training.

Bucks County spokesman Christopher Edwards said the county started the inmate monitoring program more than 30 years ago to supplement corrections staff, adding "It's a way of doubling the watch."

The Bucks County Correctional Facility has about 210 corrections officers assigned to oversee roughly 800 prisoners in the men's and women's units. Inmates earn \$3 for an eight-hour shift to monitor inmates like Vallia Valene Karaharis.

The 29-year-old Philadelphia woman was assigned an inmate monitor in September 2013 while she was on what the prison said was routine medical watch for heroin detoxification. She was found



Vallia Valene Karaharis experienced "sudden death during heroin withdrawal."

unresponsive in her prison cell, roughly four hours after she last spoke to a prison employee, according to prison officials and court documents. An autopsy and toxicology report concluded she experienced "sudden death during heroin withdrawal."

In a federal civil suit filed last year, Karaharis' mother, Loretta Lopez, alleges the use of inmate monitors contributed to her daughter's death. The defendants include Bucks County, the prison and PrimeCare Medical Inc., the county's medical service contractor. Lopez's attorney, Jonathan Feinberg, declined comment due to the ongoing litigation, as did PrimeCare and Bucks County.

"The lack of monitoring of Ms. Karaharis' medical status was due to a policy, practice or custom of correctional and medical staff at BCCF to assign inmates, referred to as 'babysitters,' the responsibility to monitor persons undergoing detoxification, notwithstanding the fact that such 'babysitters' have no

training, medical or otherwise, concerning the risks of detoxification," the suit alleges.

Karaharis is one of two inmates who have died at the Bucks County Correctional Facility during heroin detoxification since 2013 while under medical watch and assigned inmate monitoring. She is among seven inmate deaths since 2006, according to county officials.

Two of those deaths were suicides, but Edwards could only confirm one of those inmates wasn't considered a suicide risk and wasn't assigned an inmate monitor.

In response to a Right to Know request this news organization made for general information about the Bucks County inmate monitoring program, the county released some documentation — including inmate payroll records for one week and inmate pay rates. Prison officials declined to release a copy of the monitoring policy, citing concerns about possible safety threats to inmates and corrections officers. They also have refused to answer additional questions, including one about how inmate monitors are screened, selected, trained and supervised.

See **MONITORING**, Page A10

Jurors' politics could be questioned

Kathleen Kane's defense lawyers have 28 nonstandard questions to weed out potential jurors who might be biased against her.

By **MARGARET GIBBONS**
STAFF WRITER

Got a car with a bumper sticker? It may disqualify you from jury duty.

Consider the defense lawyers for embattled Pennsylvania Attorney General Kathleen Kane. On Monday, at the start of Kane's high-profile criminal trial, they'll ask potential jurors about their bumper stickers and scrutinize the snappy messages as a way to select a fair and impartial panel.

Kane's defense team has 28 other nonstandard questions to help in their screening process, noting in court records the "unique nature" of the trial, which is expected to last a week, and the "extensive media coverage" the case has received.

Among the questions the defense wants asked by Montgomery County Judge Wendy Demchick-Alloy is whether any member of the panel of prospective jurors or a close relative or friend is affiliated with the press. Another question: whether a potential juror watches, listens to or reads about any politically themed talk show, radio show or online post more than once a month or uses, reads or posts to any politically themed social media site.

The state Supreme Court on Friday turned down an 11th-hour request by Kane's lawyers to toss out her criminal charges, allowing the trial to get underway at the Montgomery County Courthouse in Norristown with the selection of 12 jurors and four alternate jurors.

Demchick-Alloy has asked that at least 100 potential jurors be made available Monday for the selection process.

Kane, 50, of the Scranton area, was arrested and charged in August 2015 with perjury, obstructing justice, official oppression and false swearing.

Authorities accused Kane of leaking secret information from a now defunct grand jury to embarrass a political enemy and then lying about her involvement as part of a cover-up. Free on \$10,000 unsecured bail, Kane continues to manage the office despite having her law license temporarily suspended because of her criminal charges.

Kane, who is serving the last year of a four-year term, opted not run for re-election this year. She is the first Democrat and first woman elected to serve as the state's top law

See **TRIAL**, Page A10



50 years later, Vietnam vet gets hero's welcome

By **CHRIS RUVO**
CORRESPONDENT

In a way, the blizzard was a blessing.

The heavy snowstorm that blanketed the Philadelphia area on Christmas Eve 1966 led soldier William F. Carroll's return flight from Vietnam to be diverted, arriving stateside around 1 a.m.

Because of the late hour, there was no one at the airport to pelt Carroll and other returning soldiers with the

insults their comrades often suffered upon returning home — "baby killer" and other unprintable slurs.

Fortunately, Carroll was able to hop a train from the Washington, D.C., area to Trenton, where his dad picked him up and brought him across the Delaware River to the family home on Christmas morning.

There he was greeted with hugs from mom and sisters — even a handmade



See **VETERAN**, Page A2



KEVIN COOK / FOR THE COURIER TIMES

Veteran Bill Carroll (right) is welcomed home by Eddie Gessford and the Warriors' Watch Riders in Levittown on Saturday to celebrate the 50th anniversary of his return from Vietnam.

86° Mostly sunny.
61° Less humid. B3

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