



KITSAP COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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Sheriff
Gary Simpson

News

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Sheriff's statement on coroner's findings

PORT ORCHARD, Wash. -- The Kitsap County Coroner has released findings involving the death of Sean Michael Howell, 28, of Bremerton. Mr. Howell died May 15 at (the former) Harrison Medical Center, Bremerton following a medical crisis that occurred in the Kitsap County Jail May 9.

An autopsy of Mr. Howell was conducted by the county's forensic pathologist and the coroner issued a determination that the cause of death was restraint asphyxia. The manner of death has been ruled a homicide by the coroner.

An investigation into Mr. Howell's death is being conducted by the Kitsap Critical Incident Response Team (KCIRT). The Washington State Patrol is the lead investigative agency. No Kitsap County Sheriff's investigators are involved.

The KCIRT investigative team provides periodic information as its investigation continues. KCIRT media releases have provided the following overview:

- Sean Michael Howell was arrested by Bremerton police Friday afternoon, May 8, for investigation into the death of his 23-year-old girlfriend, described as being a 'grisly murder.' After being cleared at a medical emergency facility for injuries sustained prior to his arrest, he was transported by a Bremerton police officer to the Kitsap County Jail around midnight on Saturday, May 9. Howell was booked into jail on a charge of murder, 1st degree.

- At the conclusion of the jail's medical and behavioral health assessment Howell was placed into a padded crisis cell dressed in a suicide prevention gown.
- Around 10:30 a.m. officers observed Howell climbing up the cell corner walls to reach a ceiling mounted sprinkler head. Due to his possible self-harm behaviors, or damaging the jail's fire suppression system, a team of four corrections officers assembled to move Howell to a different crisis cell.
- Mr. Howell was advised the reason for being moved to another cell. Howell agreed and complied with instructions. Upon unlocking the cell door, Howell attacked the corrections officers.
- Additional officers and jail medical staff responded to assist. During the officers' attempts to control his resistive and combative behaviors Howell bit into the arm of an officer.
- He was placed into hand restraints and into an emergency restraint chair when he was observed to be experiencing breathing distress. Howell was moved to the floor and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) was initiated by officers and jail medical staff.
- A South Kitsap Fire & Rescue medic unit responded to the jail. Emergency crews took over providing emergency care / CPR. He was transported by the medic unit to Harrison Medical Center. Mr. Howell died several days later.

"This is an independent investigation and therefore I have been provided few details of the incident. The coroner's report is comprehensive and complex. It needs to be reviewed in the totality of the facts and circumstances. The investigation is not yet complete," said Sheriff Gary Simpson.

"I have full confidence and faith KCIRT will complete its investigation of this incident and provide all the facts involved in this matter," Simpson added. "At the conclusion of the KCIRT investigation, the office of the Kitsap County Prosecuting Attorney will conduct a review of the incident. I support both the KCIRT investigation and the thorough review by the prosecutor's office."

When the completed report is provided, the sheriff's office of professional standards will conduct an investigative review into the policies, procedures and actions taken by the agency and personnel.

Gary Simpson
Kitsap County Sheriff