




J. Hanley

WINNEBAGO COUNTY STATE'S ATTORNEY

DATE: September 26, 2025
TO: The People of Winnebago County
FROM: J. Hanley, State's Attorney 

**JAIL INVOLVED DEATH
DECISION MEMORANDUM
DECEDENT: Tanya Gonzalez**

I. Introduction

On March 5, 2025, Tanya Gonzalez was found unresponsive in her jail cell at the Winnebago County Jail. She was later pronounced dead at UWHealth, Swedish American Hospital. The Winnebago-Boone County Integrity Task Force ("Task Force") conducted the investigation of Gonzalez's death. During the course of their investigation, investigators interviewed jail personnel, reviewed video evidence, and the results of an autopsy. The Task Force provided the Office of the Winnebago County State's Attorney its final report of investigation pursuant to the policies and procedures of the Task Force.

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide the community with an explanation of the facts of the incident, the legal principles involved, and this Office's decision as to whether any corrections officer or jail personnel should be charged criminally for their actions that night.

As detailed below, Gonzalez was alone in her cell and died as a result of "cardiac arrhythmia caused by left ventricular hypertrophy." Criminal charges are not appropriate and none will be filed.

II. Review of Officer Involved Deaths

Pursuant to an agreement of the participating law enforcement agencies in Winnebago and Boone Counties, the Task Force may investigate any death occurring in the jail. When this occurs, the State's Attorney determines whether criminal charges are appropriate.

The State's Attorney does not make any determinations regarding whether an officer may have violated police department policy or civil (non-criminal) laws.

III. Prosecutorial Standard for Filing Criminal Charges

In making a charging decision, the State's Attorney makes a determination of whether there is sufficient admissible evidence to prove each element of an offense beyond a reasonable doubt. This analysis is consistent with the American Bar Association Criminal Justice Standard 3-4.3 which provides: "A prosecutor should seek or file criminal charges only if the prosecutor reasonably believes that the charges are supported by probable cause, that admissible evidence will be sufficient to support conviction beyond a reasonable doubt, and that the decision to charge is in the interest of justice."

This is the same standard that the Winnebago County State's Attorney's Office applies to all criminal prosecutions. This analysis also requires the State's Attorney to evaluate whether there is sufficient evidence to overcome any affirmative defense that the accused is likely to raise.

IV. Facts

Unless otherwise noted, the following recitation of the facts is derived primarily from interviews of those working in the jail at the time of Gonzalez's death and video evidence – including footage from pod 1C.

Gonzalez was housed in the Winnebago County jail for felony charges related to a domestic violence incident which occurred in May of 2024. In November 2024, Gonzalez was admitted to the Elgin Mental Health Center pursuant to a court order. On February 28, 2025, Gonzalez was discharged from the Elgin Mental Health and returned to the Winnebago County Jail.

Gonzalez was assigned to classification 1C, cell 2. At that time, cell 2 was a non-camera monitored cell. No other inmates were assigned to cell 2 with Gonzalez.

Corrections Officer Karl was working in pod 1C from 6:00 p.m. on March 4 until the incident occurred on March 5 at 4:00 a.m. Officer Karl conducted rounds approximately every 15 minutes during her shift and while conducting rounds, Officer Karl was looking into Gonzalez's cell. This is confirmed in the video footage of the pod and in Officer Karl's body worn camera footage. More specifically:

At approximately 11:32 p.m., Gonzalez is seen standing at the window of her cell as Officer Karl conducts her rounds. Gonzalez is heard saying something to Officer Karl to which Officer Karl responds and advises Gonzalez that she will get "it" after she completes the round. This is the last time any verbal communication between the two is observed on camera.

Officer Karl advised that Gonzalez had been pacing in her cell but during one of the rounds after midnight she observed Gonzalez laying on her stomach on the floor and that she remained in that position on subsequent rounds. Officer Karl stated to investigators that it is not uncommon for inmates to sleep on the floor. Further, Officer Karl stated that when doing rounds, she would pause at the window of Gonzalez's cell and observe Gonzalez's breathing.

This is corroborated by the video footage. At approximately 12:58 a.m., Officer Karl walks towards Cell 2, looks in, continues walking and stops. She then comes back to Cell 2, moves close to the window and looks inside for approximately ten seconds before she keeps walking. Officer Karl pauses at Cell 2 while conducting rounds three additional times prior to 4:00 a.m.

At approximately 4:00 a.m., video footage shows Officer Karl and Nurse A.J. conducting the medication pass at Cell 2, looking into the cell window. At approximately 4:01 a.m., Officer Karl and Nurse A.J. enter Cell 2 and are out of view.

Both advised that they observed Gonzalez laying on her stomach, on the floor, unresponsive. Officer Karl and Nurse A.J. are seen stepping back out of the cell and Officer Karl grabs her radio mic and calls out a medical emergency. They both re-enter the cell. Nurse A.J., Officer Karl, and other corrections officers begin performing life saving measures, including cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) with the aid of an automated external defibrillator (AED).

At approximately 4:08 a.m., Rockford Fire/EMS arrived and performed life saving measures on Gonzalez. At approximately 4:23 a.m., Rockford Fire/EMS transported Gonzalez to UW Heath/Swedish American Hospital where she was later pronounced dead at approximately 4:35 a.m. on March 5, 2025.

The autopsy provided that Gonzalez's death was attributed to a "cardiac arrhythmia due to left ventricular hypertrophy." Her medical records show the diagnosis as "cardiac arrest." A toxicology report showed that Gonzalez had certain substances in her system, each of which had been prescribed to her and administered to her within the jail.

V. Application of the Facts to the Legal Standard

In order to charge a person criminally for Gonzalez's death, the most applicable possible charge would be involuntary manslaughter. To prove that charge, there would have had to be some action that caused Gonzalez's death. In order to prove involuntary manslaughter, the State would have to prove each of the following elements: (1) an act which causes death, (2) that act was likely to cause death or great bodily harm, and (3) that act was performed recklessly. *People v. Sexton*, 31 Ill.App.3d 593 (5th Dist., 1975). See *People v. Bolden*, 103 Ill.App.2d 377 (1st Dist., 1968) (The gist of the offense is the reckless performance of an act likely to cause death.)

With respect to all those involved, including Officer Karl and Nurse A.J., the facts do not support the crime of involuntary manslaughter. Officer Karl performed rounds and observed Gonzalez during those rounds. She specifically stated she saw Gonzalez breathing. It was later when Officer Karl and Nurse A.J. were planning on giving Gonzalez her medication that Gonzalez was found unresponsive. A medical call went out and life saving measures began immediately. Despite those efforts Gonzalez died of a heart attack. There was no act, committed recklessly or otherwise, that caused Gonzalez's death.

Next, as part of the recently passed "SAFE-T Act," the Illinois legislature created a "duty to render aid" for "law enforcement officers." 720 ILCS 5/7-15. The statute reads:

It is the policy of the State of Illinois that all law enforcement officers must, as soon as reasonably practical, determine if a person is injured, whether as a result of a use of force or otherwise, and render medical aid and assistance consistent with training and request emergency medical assistance if necessary.

A failure to render aid would subject a law enforcement officer to prosecution for the crime of "official misconduct." 720 ILCS 5/33-3(a)(1).

It is almost certain that the definition of "law enforcement officer" would not apply to corrections officers. Nevertheless, a detailed analysis of whether it applies to corrections officers is not necessary because Officer Karl's actions did not violate the "duty to render aid" statute. There is no evidence that prior to Officer Karl's entering Gonzalez's cell, Officer Karl knew that Gonzalez was in need of medical attention. When she did enter and found Gonzalez to be unresponsive, Officer Karl called out the medical emergency on her radio and immediately began life saving measures.

VI. Conclusion

Based upon the evidence reviewed and the applicable legal standards, no criminal charges will be filed in this case.