



# DANE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY ISMAEL R. OZANNE



## PRESS RELEASE For Immediate Release

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## NO CRIMINAL LIABILITY FOR DANE COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPUTIES INVOLVED IN JAIL DEATH INCIDENT ON 02-23-2024

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After briefings by investigators, a review of summary reports, surveillance video and other evidence, the Dane County District Attorney's Office concluded Tuesday, May 20, 2025, that there is no potential criminal court liability for the Dane County Sheriff's Deputies and staff involved in the medical emergency incident that occurred in the Dane County Jail on February 23, 2024.

On February 23, 2024, shortly before 11 a.m., an inmate in the female segregation unit of the Dane County Jail began showing signs of a medical emergency and was later pronounced deceased. The female inmate, who was identified as Lisa M. Harding, had been booked into the Dane County Jail on a probation hold less than 24 hours prior, on February 22, 2024, after an arrest related to a bank robbery investigation and a pursuit by law enforcement involving spike strips and a pit maneuver.

Upon entering the jail on February 22, 2024, Ms. Harding was given a pregnancy test which indicated a positive result. After beginning her booking process, Ms. Harding was transported to Meriter Hospital to be medically cleared as her arrest involved a traffic crash due to law enforcement conducting a pit maneuver. At Meriter Hospital another pregnancy test was completed, which resulted in the same positive result. Ms. Harding was medically cleared to be admitted into the jail and was transported back to the Dane County Jail in order to complete the booking process. Ms. Harding did not show any signs of injury or medical distress originally at the jail and/or subsequently at Meriter Hospital during her medical clearance evaluation, nor did Ms. Harding complain of any injury during this process.

When Ms. Harding arrived back at the Dane County Jail she was not put through the electronic body scanning equipment at the jail due to her positive pregnancy test results per the Dane County Jail's policy, and Ms. Harding was not strip searched. It was not clear if jail staff had knowledge of Ms. Harding's history of concealing items on or in her person. Ms. Harding was placed on suicide watch due to information the jail had. She was then placed in the female segregation unit and was checked by a deputy every 13 minutes, due to the suicide watch classification.

During the course of life-saving measures given to Ms. Harding, a plastic like bindle of a white powdery substance was found in her cell and one was removed from her airway by paramedics. During the autopsy two more plastic bindles were located; one of these bindles contained a white powdery substance.

Two inmates housed in the segregation unit at the same time as Ms. Harding indicated there had been no checks made by deputies prior to Ms. Harding being found in distress. These statements were proven to be false by surveillance video of the hallway outside of Ms. Harding's cell and within her cell.

The findings of the Dane County Medical Examiner's Office ruled Ms. Harding's cause of death to be mixed drug intoxication (cocaine and aripiprazole). The metabolite of fentanyl (4-ANPP) was detected on toxicologic analysis, without the presence of fentanyl. The manner of death was determined to be an accident.

Relevant evidence includes statements of law enforcement officers at the scene, evidence collection, surveillance video, which are consistent with each other.

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The role of the District Attorney's Office in a case of this type is limited to a review of the facts to determine whether further investigation is merited and, after all available evidence is obtained, whether criminal charges could be merited for any individual who has survived the incident. Police executives and supervisors have the exclusive responsibility of establishing appropriate training and protocols for use in response to crisis events, and of selecting from among the tactical options available to police in responding to particular events.

Now with the passage of Wis. Stat. 175.47 there is also a question of compliance with said Statute. This critical incident involved Deputies with the Dane County Sheriff's Office and jail staff members who were responding to a medical emergency and attempting to render life-saving measures to an individual at the Dane County Jail.

This investigation was conducted by the City of Madison Police Department (MPD) and is in compliance with the Statute. In the case of a death involving officer interactions, the Statute requires that at least two investigators from outside agencies or agencies not involved in the critical incident/Officer Involved Shooting (OIS) lead the investigation:

*(3)(a) Each policy under sub. (2) must require an investigation conducted by at least two investigators, one of whom is the lead investigator and neither of whom is employed by a law enforcement agency that employs a law enforcement officer involved in the officer-involved death.*

The Dane County Sheriff's Office requested MPD conduct the investigation in compliance with said Statute as this incident involves a death as a critical incident involving a person in custody in the Dane County Jail.

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