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Former Supervisory Deputy Jailer At Kentucky River Regional Jail Sentenced To 10 Years In Prison For Charges Related To The Death Of A Detainee

WASHINGTON – The Justice Department today announced that William Curtis Howell, 61, a former supervisory deputy jailer at the Kentucky River Regional Jail (KRRJ) in Perry County, Kentucky, has been sentenced to 120 months in federal prison related to his role in violently assaulting a pre-trial detainee and willfully failing to provide necessary medical attention that led to his death. Acting Assistant Attorney General John Gore of the Civil Rights Division, U.S. Attorney Robert M. Duncan Jr. for the Eastern District of Kentucky, and Special Agent in Charge Amy Hess for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, made the announcement.

United States District Judge Karen K. Caldwell formally sentenced Howell, on his conviction. Under federal law, Howell must serve 85 percent of his prison sentence. Following the completion of his prison term, he will be under the supervision of the United States Probation Office for three years.

On May 11, 2017, a jury convicted Howell of using excessive force against a detainee, Larry Trent, 54, and to deliberately denying him medical care after violently beating him. Another former supervisory deputy jailer, Damon Wayne Hickman, pleaded guilty on Nov. 9, 2016, to the same charges, and to obstructing justice by creating a fake medical log to cover up his and Howell's misconduct. Hickman was sentenced on Nov. 1, 2017, to serve 126 months in prison.

According to evidence and testimony presented during Howell's jury trial and Hickman's pretrial hearings, on July 9, 2013, at the Kentucky River Regional Jail in Hazard, Kentucky, Hickman and Howell violently beat Trent and left him in his cell, seriously injured and bleeding from an open head wound. Trent, who was in custody for a DUI charge, ultimately died from injuries sustained during the beating. Hickman, who was initially charged along with Howell, pleaded guilty prior to trial and testified against Howell.

According to evidence, the assault started when Howell and Hickman opened the door to Trent's cell to remove a sleeping-mat, and Trent ran out of the cell. Howell tased Trent and after Trent was brought to the floor, Hickman, without justification, violently

kicked Trent in the ribs. While deputies carried Trent back to his cell, Trent took the taser from the deputy jailers. Witnesses testified that after deputies retrieved the taser from Trent and while Trent was restrained on the floor by deputy jailers, Howell and Hickman, without justification, punched, kicked, and stomped on Trent. Witnesses further testified that, before closing the cell door, Howell stepped into Trent's cell and kicked Trent in the head while Trent was on the floor and posing no threat. Further testimony was presented that, after the assault, Trent's blood was in the detox hallway, booking area and on the deputies involved.

The evidence further revealed that Trent was lying motionless in his cell, without medical attention, with blood all over his face. Approximately four hours after the beating, another employee at the jail discovered Trent's motionless body. Paramedics were summoned and Trent was transported to a local hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

"Corrections officers throughout the country carry out their duties in a responsible manner on a daily basis," said Acting Assistant Attorney General John Gore of the Civil Rights Division. "Attacks like this one dishonor those responsible corrections officers and is a violation of civil rights, and the Department of Justice will prosecute such misconduct."

"There is no place in law enforcement or corrections for this shocking and illegal conduct," said U.S. Attorney Robert M. Duncan Jr. "The actions of those convicted dishonor the work done and sacrifices made by the overwhelming majority of law enforcement and corrections officers. All persons, including pretrial detainees and inmates, should be free of this sort of abuse. Our Office is committed to prosecuting these cases and ensuring that all persons are treated fairly under the law."

Autopsy results presented at trial showed that Trent died from internal bleeding caused by a displaced pelvic fracture, and from blunt force trauma to his head, torso, and extremities.

According to evidence presented at pretrial hearings for Hickman and at an unrelated jury trial of another KRRJ supervisory deputy jailer, Kevin Asher, Hickman and Asher assaulted another pre-trial detainee at the same jail in 2012. On Oct. 19, 2017, Asher was sentenced to 108 months imprisonment for his involvement in that unrelated inmate assault.

The Kentucky River Regional Jail houses pre-trial detainees from Perry and Knott Counties. As a supervisory deputy jailer, Hickman was responsible for the custody, care, safety and control of the inmates at the jail.

The investigation was conducted by the FBI and the Kentucky State Police. Assistant U.S. Attorney Hydee Hawkins of the United States Attorney's Office and Trial Attorney Sanjay Patel of the Civil Rights Division prosecuted this case on behalf of the federal government.

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