

JUNE ROLL CALL TRAINING

Jail High-Risk Critical Task/Inmate Suicide Prevention

The only circumstance in which government actors have a clear constitutional duty to protect individuals is when the individual is involuntarily detained. The question often arises as to the degree of liability that exists when the individual's injury is self-inflicted. When dealing with prisoners who commit suicide while being detained, the courts have required a "deliberate indifference" to the need for suicide prevention to support a constitutional claim. Most courts have required a finding that the suicide was foreseeable before an action for violation of civil rights will be established.

The purpose of this policy is to direct the proper screening of prisoners who are in need of mental health services or are at risk of self-harm, including suicide. It is the policy of this agency to provide adequate mental health screening and care for those persons incarcerated in jail. The booking officer shall screen all persons booked into the jail to identify potential safety risks including self-harm; suicide; danger to others (assault risk); mental illness; alcohol or drug abuse; cognitive deficits; and/or the need for special accommodations.

The booking officer shall check the incoming prisoner's history in the jail records management system for any alerts or known risk factors and complete the medical health screening form which has been approved by the agency. In any case where it is indicated that the prisoner needs immediate psychological care, staff shall place the prisoner on high-risk protocols. Jail staff shall summon emergency medical services immediately for any inmate who is unconscious; seriously injured; seriously ill and in need of urgent medical care; or seriously mentally ill and gravely disabled (demonstrating a lack of judgment or understanding to the point that his or her health and safety are significantly endangered and lacks the capacity to understand that it is the case).

When a detainee shows signs of or reports unusual mental distress, he or she shall be referred to a qualified mental health professional as soon as possible. Detainees exhibiting psychiatric symptoms such as acute psychosis or severe mood disturbances, or detainees who have a known psychiatric history, shall be evaluated by a mental health professional. Detainees exhibiting suicidal behavior or ideations shall be placed in a reasonable level of care that provides for their safety and stability. Jail staff shall conduct in-person welfare checks on any prisoner who has been placed under special observation due to mental health concerns or suicide precautions every 10 to 15 minutes as mandated by agency policy. A prisoner who is placed on suicide watch shall not be taken off suicide watch except at the direction of a qualified mental health professional that has completed a suicide risk evaluation.

Question: Is there a policy mandate with respect to heightened security measures that applies to prisoners who have been identified as suicide risks?

Answer: Yes, at risk prisoners must be closely monitored and physically observed through direct in-person surveillance by staff every 10 to 15 minutes as mandated by agency policy. Records must be maintained of these welfare checks in the agency records management system.