

NEWS

Dinwiddie charges Henrico deputies with murder of man in their custody at Central State Hospital



Bill Atkinson

The Progress-Index

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DINWIDDIE – Seven Henrico County sheriff’s deputies have been arrested on murder charges in the death earlier this month of a Henrico County man they restrained after he reportedly began violently struggling while being admitted to Central State Hospital.

Dinwiddie Commonwealth’s Attorney Ann Cabell Baskervill said each of the seven is facing one count of second-degree murder. All are being held without bond at the Meherrin River Regional Jail.

The seven employees are

Randy Joseph Boyer, 57, of Henrico;
Dwayne Alan Bramble, 37, of Sandston;
Jermaine Lavar Branch, 45, of Henrico;
Bradley Thomas Disse, 43, of Henrico;
Tabitha Rene Levere, 50, of Henrico;
Brandon Edward Rodgers, 48, of Henrico; and
Kalyell Dajour Sanders, 30, of Chesterfield County.

They are charged in the March 6 death of Irvo Otieno, 28, of Henrico. Otieno was brought to CSH by Henrico deputies in the afternoon, and according to reports, he became combative during admittance and was put in restraints. He later died at the hospital.

“Mr. Otieno’s family was notified by my office this morning of these charges and I will continue to work with and for his family in relation to pursuing this case to its fullest extent,” Baskervill said in a statement released by her office.

The Virginia State Police is leading the criminal investigation of the case and were responsible for arresting the deputies, VSP spokesperson Corinne Geller said. No other details of the investigation or the circumstances surrounding Otieno's death are being released.

More: Governor, police union weigh in on deputies' arrests following death at Central State Hospital

In a statement, Henrico Sheriff Alisa Gregory said all seven deputies have been placed on administrative leave pending the outcome of the cases. Gregory said her office was conducting its own investigation into the incident separately from the state police probe, but also is "cooperating fully" with the state police.

"As Henrico County Sheriff and on behalf of our entire office, I extend my deepest sympathies and condolences to the family and friends of Mr. Irvo Otieno," Gregory said in the statement. "The events of March 6, at their core, represent a tragedy because Mr. Otieno's life was lost. This loss is felt by not only those close to him but our entire community."

Bill Atkinson (he/him/his) is an award-winning journalist who covers breaking news, government and politics. Reach him at batkinson@progress-index.com or on Twitter at [@BAtkinson_PI](https://twitter.com/BAtkinson_PI).

The Progress-Index

NEWS

Central State patient's family retains civil-rights attorney Ben Crump, their lawyer says



Bill Atkinson

The Progress-Index

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DINWIDDIE — The family of the man who died at Central State Hospital after being restrained by Henrico County deputies has retained civil-rights attorney Ben Crump, according to the family lawyer.

Crump will be introduced at a news conference Thursday afternoon called by Mark Krudys, the lawyer for Irvo Otieno's family at the Dinwiddie County Courthouse. His retaining was first reported by The Washington Post.

Crump is a nationally recognized attorney who gained attention for representing the families of Trayvon Martin, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor, the Black victims in three high-profile U.S. murders in the last 10 years.

Otieno, a 28-year-old Kenyan living in Henrico County, died March 6 after Henrico deputies brought him to Central State. According to reports, during the admission process, Otieno became disruptive, prompting the deputies to restrain him.

Each of the deputies has been charged with one count of second-degree murder in Otieno's death. Dinwiddie commonwealth's attorney Ann Cabell Baskervill said a "disturbing" video from CSH surveillance showed the deputies throwing a handcuffed and shirtless Otieno face down on the floor and lying on top of him. According to Baskervill, the state medical examiner has preliminarily said Otieno died of asphyxiation.

The seven deputies appeared in Dinwiddie Circuit Court Wednesday morning. Two of them have been released on bond, and the other five are being held at jails in Brunswick and Hanover counties.

They have been identified as Jermaine Lavar Branch, 45; Bradley Thomas Disse, 43; Randy Joseph Boyer, 57; Dwayne Alan Bramble, 37; Tabitha Rene Levere, 50; Brandon Edward Rodgers, 48; and Kalyell Dajour Sanders, 30. Branch and Disse were granted bonds of \$15,000 and \$10,000 respectively, and ordered not to be in contact with anyone involved in the case while out.

A grand jury will convene next Tuesday to decide if the deputies will be indicted.

More: CSH death update: Two deputies granted bond, prosecutor details 'disturbing' video of restraint

More: Governor, police union weigh in on deputies' arrests following death at Central State Hospital

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The Progress-Index

NEWS

Mother of murdered Central State patient says deputies, hospital staff 'smothered my son'

Just as the news conference was starting, the Dinwiddie commonwealth's attorney announced that three Central State Hospital staffers involved in restraining Irvo Otieno have been arrested



Bill Atkinson

The Progress-Index

Published 5:49 p.m. ET March 16, 2023 | Updated 4:49 p.m. ET March 17, 2023

DINWIDDIE – Caroline Ouko did not pull any punches in describing how she feels her son died earlier this month.

“They tortured him to death,” an emotional Ouko said during a news conference outside the Dinwiddie County Courthouse Thursday afternoon. She later said through tears, “My son was treated like a dog ... worse than a dog!”

The “they” she referred to are the seven Henrico County deputies charged with second-degree murder in the death of Irvo [pronounced EYE-voh] Otieno, 28, on March 6 at Central State Hospital in Dinwiddie County. According to video from CSH surveillance, the seven deputies are seen throwing Otieno in handcuffs to the floor and lying across him, including one with their knee on the back of his neck, for more than 11 minutes.

“They smothered my baby,” Ouko said.

The news conference was called to introduce Ben Crump as co-counsel for Otieno’s family. Crump is a nationally known civil-rights attorney who featured prominently in several high-profile cases involving the deaths of Black citizens at the hands of law-enforcement personnel.

At the same time the news conference was going on, Dinwiddie commonwealth’s attorney Ann Cabell Baskervill announced that three CSH employees have been arrested in Otieno’s death, bringing the number of suspects in the case to 10.

The employees are Darian M. Blackwell, 23, of Petersburg, Wavie L. Jones, 34, of Chesterfield, and Sadarius D. Williams, 27, of North Dinwiddie. All three are being held at the Meherrin River Regional Jail in Brunswick County.

They join the seven deputies -- Jermaine Lavar Branch, 45; Bradley Thomas Disse, 43; Randy Joseph Boyer, 57; Dwayne Alan Bramble, 37; Tabitha Rene Levere, 50; Brandon Edward Rodgers, 48; and Kalyell Dajour Sanders, 30. Branch and Disse were able to post bond and are out of custody. Four of the remaining five are at Meherrin River. Sanders is being held at Pamunkey Regional Jail in Hanover County.

More: CSH death update: Two deputies granted bond, prosecutor details 'disturbing' video of restraint

The state medical examiner's office in Richmond has tentatively ruled Otieno's cause of death as asphyxia, and the manner of death as homicide.

The hour-long news conference, which drew local and national news reporters to Dinwiddie, took place after Crump, co-counsel Mark Krudys and Otieno's family were shown the videos of Otieno's treatment both at the local jail in Henrico and later at CSH. They all said they could see no evidence of Otieno being disruptive or violent as the deputies had claimed. Instead, as Crump said, they saw "almost a lifeless body" in handcuffs and leg chains being manhandled by deputies.

Three days before his death, Otieno, who had a history of mental-health struggles, was a person of interest in a burglary and theft in his Henrico neighborhood. Officers took him from his home to Henrico Doctor's Hospital for a check-up and then to the county's western jail complex.

Oyko said she was never allowed to see her son. The last time she saw him was when he was being led away, and video from a cell phone at the scene depicted her as comforting her son and telling officers he suffered from mental issues.

At the jail in Henrico County, they said, a surveillance video showed Otieno handcuffed and naked in the cell with feces on the floor purported to be his when deputies came in and began striking him. When he was taken from Henrico to CSH, he was shirtless but had on some pants, and was in both handcuffs and leg chains and appeared to be extremely catatonic.

Krudys said the video at CSH showed Otieno seated in a chair at a table in the hospital's intake area with deputies holding him down. At no time, Krudys said, did Otieno ever attempt

to stand up and fight, and was pushed from the chair to the floor and held down.

An underlying message through the news conference was the claim that people with mental health problems should not be treated as criminals. Otieno had a history of mental-health issues.

Crump said the cruelty in which Otieno was seen being treated was unbelievable and unnecessary. Otieno was not putting up any struggle and was cuffed the whole time.

The CSH video showed not only the deputies restraining Otieno but also the three CSH employees who were arrested. Everyone else, Krudys said, appeared to be standing around “with their hands in their pockets” and not trying to intervene.

“What we just viewed on the video leading to the death of Irvo was a commentary on how inhumane law-enforcement officials treat people who are having a mental-health crisis as criminals rather than treating them as people who are in need of help,” Crump said.

Crump likened Otieno’s case to that of George Floyd, a black man who died in Minneapolis Police custody in 2020. Video seen around the world showed a police officer with his knee across Floyd’s neck and saying, “I can’t breathe” several times.

“He was just lying there on the floor,” Crump said. “What possible threat could he have been?”

Crump and Krudys said they want the U.S. Justice Department to launch an investigation. They also said they would like to see Baskervill release the video from Central State, but Baskervill reiterated that is not something she plans to do.

“A key element of that evidence is the surveillance video from Central State Hospital that captures the intake process,” she said. “To maintain the integrity of the criminal justice process at this point, I am not able to publicly release the video.”

Lauren Cunningham, a spokesperson for the state Department of Behavioral health and Developmental Services, said the three Central State employees arrested have been put on administrative leave. Cunningham also said the hospital and DBHDS “are fully cooperating” with the Virginia State Police, the agency leading the investigation.

“We will respect the legal process while we and our staff continue to provide important care to the patients at Central State Hospital,” Cunningham said in an email to The Progress-Index.

A grand jury will convene March 21 to determine if charges will be filed against the suspects.

More: Petersburg motels owners participate in illicit activity, a P-I investigation finds

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The Progress-Index

COURTS

CSH death update: Two deputies granted bond, prosecutor details 'disturbing' video of restraint



Bill Atkinson

The Progress-Index

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DINWIDDIE — Two of the seven Henrico County deputies charged in the death of a man at Central State Hospital earlier this month have been granted bond.

A Dinwiddie Circuit Court judge set bonds of \$15,000 for Jermaine Lavar Branch, 45, and \$10,000 for Bradley Thomas Disse, 43 during everyone's first appearance in court Wednesday morning. If they are able to post the bonds, Branch and Disse will be released under an order to not have any contact with anyone involved in the case.

The other five deputies — Randy Joseph Boyer, 57; Dwayne Alan Bramble, 37; Tabitha Rene Levere, 50; Brandon Edward Rodgers, 48; and Kalyell Dajour Sanders, 30, all remain in custody. Sanders is being held at Pamunkey Regional Jail in Hanover County, and the others are being held at Meherrin River Regional Jail in Brunswick County.

Each is facing one charge of second-degree murder in the death of Irvo Otieno, 28, of Henrico County. Otieno died March 6 shortly upon arrival at CSH in suburban Petersburg after reports said he became violent during the admission process and had to be restrained by the Henrico deputies who brought him to the hospital.

Dinwiddie commonwealth's attorney Ann Cabell Baskervill objected to the granting of bonds for Branch and Disse.

At the hearing Wednesday morning, Baskervill told the court that video footage taken from CSH's patient intake area on March 6 shows the deputies throwing a handcuffed Otieno face down to the floor and lying across him in a smothering fashion to restrain him. The entire episode lasted about 12 minutes, and while the video was not shown in court, Baskervill called it "disturbing" and proof of unnecessary cruelty against the victim.

Baskervill said she viewed the video from Central State and immediately sought the deputies' arrest through a prosecutorial process known as "criminal information."

More: What is 'criminal information' and how is it used in the judicial system?

A preliminary cause of death, according to the prosecutor, was asphyxiation. The state medical examiner also preliminarily ruled the manner of death as homicide.

Otieno, a native of Kenya, reportedly suffered from mental-health issues and was a suspect in a Henrico burglary three days prior to his death.

Baskervill said Virginia State Police, the lead investigators in the case, were not notified of Otieno's death until more than three hours after the incident took place.

A Dinwiddie grand jury will meet at 9 a.m. March 21 to determine if the deputies should be indicted. A second-degree murder conviction carries a maximum 40-year prison sentence in Virginia.

The Henrico sheriff told The Progress-Index that all seven deputies are on paid administrative leave pending the outcome of the cases.

Mark Krudys, an attorney representing the victim's family, released the following statement to reporters Wednesday morning after the hearing: "The family is grief-stricken after learning of the brutal nature of Ivor's death and his inhumane treatment in the hours preceding his death. The public, and experienced mental health professionals alike, will be appalled when the facts of this case are fully disclosed."

"Ivor" is the name Otieno's family called him.

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The Progress-Index

COURTS

Baskervill will release hospital video of patient's death but not video of jail treatment ... yet

She did leave open the possibility of eventually releasing the jail video 'as things develop'



Bill Atkinson

The Progress-Index

Published 8:47 p.m. ET March 19, 2023

DINWIDDIE — A video purported to show seven Henrico County deputies and three Central State Hospital employees fatally restraining a mental patient earlier this month will be released to the public Tuesday, the Dinwiddie County commonwealth's attorney said, but don't look yet for a companion video that reportedly shows deputies manhandling the patient in a jail cell.

Ann Cabell Baskervill said in an email to The Progress-Index Sunday afternoon that she does not plan to release the jail footage, but left the door open for a possible release "as things develop" in the case.

"The only value in releasing it would be if it will lead to a more compassionate and understanding society," Baskervill said. "If it would lead to that, then that is something that we do want to promote. However, I worry that it will be taken out of context."

The family of Irvo Otieno has seen both of the videos and is encouraging Baskervill to release them, according to their attorneys Ben Crump and Mark Krudys. But Baskervill said in the email she was hesitant because "I'm not trying to step on Henrico's toes."

She also said the jail video, which she called "really sad," should not be "how the world should know Irvo Otieno."

Otieno, a 28-year-old Kenyan native who lived in Henrico County, died March 6 in an admissions area of Central State Hospital on the outskirts of Petersburg in Dinwiddie County. The prosecution says a preliminary cause of his death was suffocation caused when the deputies and hospital personnel held Otieno down for approximately 12 minutes and in some

cases stretch across him. One deputy is reported to have his knee on Otieno's neck for a period.

Deputies claimed Otieno, who was shirtless, shoeless and reportedly lethargic during the incident, struggled against them, prompting the restraint.

Baskervill originally did not plan to release the video from Central State, but she would do so to oblige Otieno's family.

She said another reason troubling her about releasing the jail video was feedback she said she was getting from former Henrico inmates and their families who claimed that such treatment was commonplace at the jail. In that video, Otieno is nude and handcuffed in the cell, supposedly surrounded by his own feces.

“If there are a lot of other people who experienced something similar – and the only reason we don't know about it is because they didn't die (weren't murdered) – then I would be more inclined to release it,” she wrote. “But all I have now is anecdotes, and I don't think that's enough at this point.”

Prosecutor addresses 'not playing nice' criticism

Baskervill also weighed in on comments made by attorneys for some of the deputies and the Henrico Fraternal Order of Police that she was being too aggressive in the prosecution. She sought all the arrests through a little-known process called “criminal information,” where a prosecutor submits the evidence straight to the circuit court and the court issues a capias for the immediate arrests. It eliminates the need for a preliminary hearing on the evidence before a judge and sends the case straight to the grand jury.

It's used when the suspect is considered a threat to the surrounding community and/or is considered a flight risk. Baskervill said she took this route because she watched the videos and determined that the deputies could be a threat to the inmates at the county jail.

“I have never minded criticism about me 'not playing nice' with established interests – that's fine and fair – but if I alienate too much of society by veering too far out of my lane, then that will be counterproductive,” Baskervill said. “I won't be pressured either way, though I am receptive to input on this from all perspectives because although I'm a decision-maker, I'm not doing this for me.”

The seven deputies charged are Jermaine Lavar Branch, 45; Bradley Thomas Disse, 43; Randy Joseph Boyer, 57; Dwayne Alan Bramble, 37; Tabitha Rene Levere, 50; Brandon Edward Rodgers, 48; and Kalyell Dajour Sanders, 30. The hospital employees are Darian M. Blackwell, 23, of Petersburg, Wavie L. Jones, 34, of Chesterfield, and Sadarius D. Williams, 27, of North Dinwiddie.

Seven of the 10 suspects are being held at the Meherrin River Regional Jail in Brunswick County. One deputy, Sanders, is being held at the Pamunkey Regional Jail in Hanover County.

Two of the deputies, Branch and Disse, have been released on bond.

The grand jury will meet at 9 a.m. Tuesday at the Dinwiddie County Courthouse.

More: GoFundMe account for Central State patient's family sets \$100K for funeral, other expenses

More: Why was Irvo Otieno treated with such brutality? Family still searching for answers.

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The Progress-Index

COURTS

Dinwiddie prosecutor releases video showing officers, staff covering Otieno; grand jury indicts 10 suspects



Bill Atkinson

The Progress-Index

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Key Points

Seven officers, three hospital staff indicted

DINWIDDIE – Irvo Otieno’s last few minutes of life were spent under the mass of as many as nine people as they pinned him to the floor of a hospital’s admissions unit, and when every effort to revive him had been exhausted, his body lay shrouded on that same floor, joined only by two people sitting at a nearby table.

That is what is on a roughly 90-minute video at the centerpiece of a second-degree murder case that commonwealth’s attorney Ann Cabell Baskervill presented Tuesday morning to a Dinwiddie grand jury. Ten people – seven Henrico County sheriff’s deputies and three Central State Hospital employees – were named suspects in the 28-year-old’ Black man's death. In the end, the grand jury indicted all ten suspects.

The video shows that Otieno is so completely covered by deputies and staff that only glimpses of him can be seen in the first 20 minutes of the video: the top of his head for a moment, a twitching foot.

The suspects indicted are deputies Jermaine Lavar Branch, 45; Bradley Thomas Disse, 43; Randy Joseph Boyer, 57; Dwayne Alan Bramble, 37; Tabitha Rene Levere, 50; Brandon Edward Rodgers, 48; and Kalyell Dajour Sanders, 30; and hospital employees Darian M. Blackwell, 23, of Petersburg, Wavie L. Jones, 34, of Chesterfield, and Sadarius D. Williams, 27, of North Dinwiddie.

Irvo Otieno [pronounced EYE-voh oh-TEYEN-no] died March 6 of apparent suffocation brought on when the deputies and CSH staffers restrained him over a 12-minute period. At the request of Otieno's family, Baskervill released the hospital video to the public once the grand jury reached its decision.

The day Otieno died

Here are the events of March 6 as they unfolded, according to the timestamps on the hospital video:

4:19 p.m. — A shirtless and shoeless Otieno is taken into the admissions intake room. He seems lethargic and is wearing handcuffs. He appears unable to walk, and is first placed across a table, then put on the floor with his head against a cushioned chair. At least two deputies press his head against the chair, even though the only parts of him moving are his bare feet as if they were twitching.

4:25 p.m. — Deputies move Otieno's head off of the chair and lay him completely down on the floor. At this point, another deputy approaches and stands near Otieno's legs.

4:27 p.m. — A fourth deputy approaches, and the two of them kneel down to hold Otieno's legs down. His feet are still moving slightly.

4:27:46 p.m. — The deputies appear to relax their grip on Otieno and he begins to move.

4:28 p.m. — More deputies step over to help restrain him, and they are joined by three CSH employees. One of the deputies appears to lie over Otieno to keep him still. There are now five deputies and the three employees holding him down.

4:31 p.m. — The deputies and hospital employees roll Otieno over and away from the chair. A deputy wearing a cap walks over and appears to help his fellow officers restrain Otieno. A seventh deputy is standing by watching.

4:31 p.m.-4:39 p.m. — Deputies and hospital personnel shift their weight and positions while continuing to hold Otieno face down.

4:39 p.m. — The deputies release their grip on Otieno and roll him over slightly. Two begin checking his neck for a pulse. One of the deputies notices Otieno's arms are limp. The deputies step away, while one of the employees continues to check for breathing or a pulse, and a deputy shakes Otieno's arm as if he is trying to rouse him.

4:40 p.m. — The deputies clear the way for a hospital employee to pull Otieno's pants partly down and inject him in the buttocks.

4:41 p.m. — As people mill about the room, Otieno can be seen lying almost face down on his right side. His left arm is bent into the floor. Deputies roll him onto his back and then

step away as medical personnel begin attending to him. In the background, someone is on the phone.

4:42 p.m. — Deputies remove his handcuffs and the hospital staff begins administering cardiopulmonary resuscitation. CPR continues to be administered by different hospital staffers for the next 26 minutes. By now the room has become filled with others, some assisting and some watching. In the meantime, the deputies can be seen in a hallway just outside the room looking in and huddling among themselves.

5:08 p.m. — A Dinwiddie emergency medical services team arrives in the room and takes over the treatment for the next 23 minutes. An automatic CPR machine is attached to Otieno's chest to continue compressions while the EMS crew checks for vitals and other signs of life.

5:41 p.m. — The personnel end treatment and start to clean up and pack up.

5:48 p.m. — A crew member drapes Otieno's body with a white sheet. By this time, the room has cleared out, and the deputies are nowhere in sight.

5:49 p.m. — The EMS crew leaves.

6 p.m. — The video ends with two people sitting at a table in the admissions area. Otieno's body remains unmoved.

The Virginia State Police said they were contacted about Otieno's death close to 7:30 p.m., 90 minutes after the video's end.

Family asked for video release

At a news conference March 16 outside the Dinwiddie courthouse, Otieno's family and their attorneys called for Baskervill to release the CSH video, as well as a video taken at the Henrico County Jail that shows Otieno nude and handcuffed surrounded by his own feces while deputies manhandle him. Baskervill told The Progress-Index Sunday she does not plan to release that video, but left the door open for that decision to change.

A memorial service for Otieno has not yet been scheduled, according to his family. His brother, Leon Ocheingo, has created a GoFundMe account to cover final expenses.

More: GoFundMe account for Central State patient's family sets \$100K for funeral, other expenses

The case has drawn national and worldwide attention because of its similarities to other high-profile killings of Black citizens over the last decade. Well-known civil-rights attorney Ben

Crump, whose name has been attached to the cases of Trayvon Martin, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor, joined the family's legal team.

Crump has likened the manner in which Otieno died to the 2020 death of George Floyd while being restrained by Minneapolis Police. Video of Floyd's arrest shows an officer with his knee across Floyd's neck, with Floyd uttering, "I can't breathe."

Otieno was arrested on March 3, after pulling up a neighbor's solar lights during what his mother said was a moment of mental distress. After being brought by police to a hospital for evaluation, he was transferred that evening to a Henrico jail.

"So they pulled him off treatment, took him to jail, didn't take him down there with any medicine," his mother, Caroline Ouko, said at a Mar. 16 press conference. On the afternoon of Mar. 6, he was transferred to Central State, where he died.

More: Why was Irvo Otieno treated with such brutality? Family still searching for answers.

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The Progress-Index

NEWS

Mourners remember Irvo Otieno: Big-hearted, always kind, budding rapper, reason for change



Bill Atkinson

The Progress-Index

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CHESTERFIELD – Family and friends said goodbye to Irvo Otieno Wednesday in a service that both celebrated his life and served as a clarion call for reform in mental health care for minorities.

“Everybody loved Irvo,” childhood and high-school friend Jimmy Marshall said through tears. “Thank you for all the great memories. Rest in peace. I miss you, brother.”

Otieno’s brother, Leon Ochieng, called him “the big brother I never had” even though Otieno was younger than him. Ochieng, who was coming home to the Richmond area to help his brother start his musical career when Otieno died March 6, has vowed to fight for justice in the memory of Otieno.

“Irvo’s life has given me purpose,” Ochieng said as he stood over the flower-draped casket of his brother.

Otieno, 28, apparently suffocated to death when seven Henrico County deputies and three Central State Hospital security guards pinned him to the floor of an admissions area at the hospital. The deputies claimed Otieno had been combative and was trying to resist them when they brought him to CSH, but the family said Otieno, who suffered from mental-health illness, was only trying to breathe under the mass of the people piled upon him.

Otieno’s mother, Caroline Ouko, spoke to her late son directly in her remarks. She called him a “soldier” and “the man.”

“When I took my son to the hospital, this is not what I envisioned,” Ouko said. “Son, this is where we are and I’m sorry.”

Three days before his death, Henrico Police came to Otieno's home investigating a burglary in which a neighbor claimed he was involved. When they got there, Otieno was in the midst of a mental crisis, and his mother was asking them to take that under consideration. Otieno was taken to Henrico Doctors Hospital for treatment and then, as his mother claimed, "whisked out the back door" of the hospital and taken to jail.

Surveillance video released by the Dinwiddie commonwealth's attorney's office showed Henrico deputies manhandling a lethargic and unmedicated Otieno in his jail cell. Later, video from the hospital showed the seven deputies and three CSH security guards atop him for 12 minutes, during which he reportedly suffocated.

All 10 of those people have been indicted in Dinwiddie County on charges of second-degree murder.

"We will get to the bottom of what happened to you," Ouko said during the service. "We will stand for you. We will walk for you.

"Rest in peace, my son," she added. "Shine on. Rest in power. I love you and I will always love you.

Watch the livestream of the Irvo Otieno memorial service at [this link](#).

Hundreds in attendance

The two-hour service at First Baptist Church of South Richmond's Chesterfield campus drew hundreds of people. The auditorium was opened early so mourners could file past Otieno's open casket and pay respects. Otieno was dressed in a gold shirt, and dark bow tie and suit.

His casket was closed prior to the family's arrival and stayed closed for the duration of the service.

The service was delayed for about an hour because the Rev. Al Sharpton, who delivered the eulogy, was late in arriving from New York to Richmond. It was supposed to begin at 11:30 a.m., but did not actually get started until 66 minutes later.

In his eulogy, Sharpton called for increased awareness of mental-health awareness among the minority communities, especially in the way Black mental patients are treated as opposed to Whites or other races. When Black people are in the throes of mental illness, they are treated like criminals instead of receiving the medical assistance they need.

More: Mourners remember Irvo Otieno: Big-hearted, always kind, budding rapper, reason for change

“The disgrace is not that Irvo had mental illness,” Sharpton said. “The disgrace is how you treated him [referring to the deputies and the CSH personnel].”

Earlier in the service, Richmond City Councilor Mike Jones, one of two Scripture readers at the service, touched on that same theme.

“Mental health should not be stigmatized like it is,” Jones said. “As a legislator, we need to do more.”

Sharpton called on Gov. Glenn Youngkin to prioritize minority mental-health treatment in Virginia. Youngkin, who brought the governor’s office back to the Republicans when he was elected in 2021, has often been mentioned as a potential GOP presidential candidate in 2024, and Sharpton touched on that.

“Youngkin won’t be president if he can’t explain his policies as far as mental health goes,” Sharpton said. Later, he encouraged Youngkin to remember Otieno’s death in championing “Irvo’s Law” that would address inequities in treatment.

“If the governor wants to run for president, he must go through Caroline,” Sharpton said, referring to Otieno’s mother.

Youngkin did not attend the service, but representing his administration were Secretary of the Commonwealth Kay Cole James and advisor Richard Cullen. Youngkin spokesperson Macaulay Porter said in an email to The Progress-Index that the governor "remains steadfast that we must get to a place in the commonwealth where people in need of mental health services are met pre-crisis" and is "committed to transformative changes in Virginia’s behavioral health system so that all Virginians can receive the help they need when they need it."

More: Guest column: You have to wonder what the deputies, guards on Irvo Otieno were thinking

Celebration of life

The two-hour service was a celebration of Otieno’s 28 years. Several pastors offered different prayers not just for Otieno and his family, but also for lawmakers and the people prosecuting the suspects in Dinwiddie County.

A tribute video showed various family photos with Otieno, and many of them focused on his love of playing football and basketball in pee-wee league and at Douglas Freeman High School. While the pictures were shown, the soundtrack featured Otieno, an aspiring musician, performing an original rap song.

At the end of the video, an image of Irvo Otieno was superimposed over the scene of a sunset, As it faded, mourners leaped to their feet cheering, clapping and shouting praises and hallelujahs.

Classmate Zachary Weiss remembered Otieno displaying “a lot of humility that I admired.” He said he would miss Otieno’s “laugh and his million-dollar smile.”

As the service ended, Bishop Daniel Wainaina, one of the family’s pastors, encouraged mourners to leave the church feeling “forgiveness” because that is what Otieno would have wanted.

More: Dinwiddie judge rejects defense motion to hold Irvo Otieno's body as evidence

More: Surveillance video shows deputies, hospital workers pinning Irvo Otieno to the ground

More: Will Irvo Otieno's death be the seed that sparks national reform on mental health? People are hoping so.

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The Progress-Index

NEWS

Dinwiddie drops charges against two of 10 suspects in Irvo Otieno death case

The prosecutor said withdrawing the charges against two Central State Hospital employees should strengthen the commonwealth's case against seven Henrico deputies and a third hospital employee



Bill Atkinson

The Progress-Index

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DINWIDDIE – Murder charges have been dropped against two of the 10 suspects in the March 6 death of a Henrico County man while in custody at Central State Hospital.

Dinwiddie County Commonwealth’s Attorney Ann Cabell Baskervill said in an email Tuesday to The Progress-Index that she decided to withdraw second-degree murder charges against Darian M. Blackwell, 23, of Petersburg, and Sadarius Williams, 27, of Dinwiddie. These two men were employed as security personnel at CSH when 28-year-old Irvo Otieno died.

Baskervill said similar charges against the eight other suspects — a third CSH employee and seven deputies with the Henrico County Sheriff’s Department — remain in place.

Otieno, who suffered from mental-health issues, died at Central State as the deputies were bringing him there for observation. A video of the processing unit where they were showed the deputies and others pinning an apparently incoherent Otieno to the floor and lying across him after they claimed he became belligerent and tried to escape.

Baskervill made headlines when she used the video to directly file second-degree murder charges against all parties involved — deputies Jermaine Lavar Branch, 45; Bradley Thomas Disse, 43; Randy Joseph Boyer, 57; Dwayne Alan Bramble, 37; Tabitha Rene Levere, 50; Brandon Edward Rodgers, 48; and Kaiyell Dajour Sanders, 30; and hospital employee Wavie L. Jones, 34, of Chesterfield.

In dropping the charges against the two CSH employees, Baskervill said she did so because Blackwell and Williams were not as involved in Otieno’s death as the others

“I certainly do find that Mr. Williams and Mr. Blackwell do not have the level of culpability that would be appropriate for moving forward with trial,” Baskervill said in the email. “Much of this is visible on the videos and considering the back story.”

Baskervill, who is stepping down as Dinwiddie prosecutor this month to study in Europe, said she thinks dropping those charges will strengthen the commonwealth’s case in the future. An interim prosecutor for the county has not yet been selected.

“The decision to withdraw the charges was heavy but it was not difficult,” she said in the email. “I believe this places the prosecution of Irvo Otieno’s homicide in the strongest possible position upon my departure. There is no doubt in my mind that the Commonwealth is now in a position to win when this ultimately goes to trial, and that truth, transparency, and justice will prevail.”

Baskervill said she does not expect her successor to withdraw any more charges in the case. “I would be very disappointed and shocked if that were to happen,” she added.

Mark Krudys, one of the attorneys for the Otieno family, declined to comment on Baskervill's decision. The family is also being represented by civil-rights attorney Benjamin Crump.

Otieno’s family has requested that the U.S. Justice Department step in and help with the case. Baskervill said she asked the feds for assistance but has not yet heard their response.

“I think at this point we have to assume it will stay in Dinwiddie courts,” she said.

Baskervill, who was not planning to run for re-election this November, is leaving Dinwiddie to pursue a graduate degree in governance and diplomacy in Europe. She said she accepted the offer from L’Institut des Études Politiques in Paris on March 4, two days before Otieno’s death. Her departure, she said, has nothing to do with the Otieno case.

Her last day on the Dinwiddie job is Wednesday, June 21.

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The Progress-Index

LOCAL

Trials set for eight suspects in death of Irvo Otieno at Central State Hospital



Bill Atkinson

Petersburg Progress-Index

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DINWIDDIE – Trials for the eight people accused in the March death of a Henrico County man at Central State Hospital will begin next June and run through the end of 2024.

Each of the trials has been scheduled for five days, according to the calendar set Tuesday in Dinwiddie Circuit Court. Before they happen, however, pre-trial hearings will be held beginning next month through January.

The suspects – seven Henrico County sheriff’s deputies and a now-former CSH security officer – are each charged with second-degree murder in the suffocation death of Irvo Noel Otieno. Otieno, a 28-year-old man with a history of mental illness, died March 6 when the deputies and hospital security used their bodies to pin him to the floor of an intake unit where he was being admitted.

Otieno had been in police custody for three days when he died. He was originally picked up on suspicion of a neighborhood burglary, but due to his mental condition at the time, he was taken to a Henrico hospital and then straight to jail. Deputies were taking him to CSH for mental evaluation when he died.

Originally, 10 people were indicted, but charges were eventually dropped against two other security officers.

The trial dates are as scheduled:

Dwayne Allen Bramble, 37 – June 3-7, 2024;

Jermaine Lavar Branch, 45 – Aug. 5-9, 2024;

Bradley Thomas Disse, 43 – Aug. 12-16, 2024

Randy Joseph Boyer, 57 – Sept. 9-13, 2024;

Wavie L. Jones, 34 – Sept. 30-Oct. 4, 2024;

Brandon Edward Rogers, 48 – Oct. 7-11, 2024;
Tabita Rene Levere, 50 – Oct. 28-Nov. 1, 2024; and
Kaiyell Dajour Sanders, 30 – Dec. 2-6, 2024.

Disse, Boyer and Bramble have pre-trial hearings set for Nov. 1, Nov. 22 and Dec. 20, respectively. Sanders, Branch, Jones and Levere are set to reappear in court Jan. 10, 2024; and Rodgers on Jan. 31.

A lawyer for Otieno's family released a statement late Monday praising interim commonwealth's attorney Jonathan Bourlier for "diligently prosecuting" the cases. Bourlier took over as Dinwiddie's top prosecutor in June following the resignation of Ann Cabell Baskervill, who originally began the proceedings after viewing hospital surveillance video of Otieno's treatment and death.

Attorney Mark Krudys said Bourlier "appears to have marshalled the resources of his office to bring justice in this matter."

It will be up to Dinwiddie voters next month if Bourlier will be the one to move ahead with the prosecutions. Baskervill previously announced plans to not seek re-election and left the job early to study international politics in Paris. Bourlier and Amanda Mann are battling on the November ballot to be her permanent successor.

Krudys' vote of confidence in Bourlier is a reversal of a stance he and family co-counsel Ben Crump had earlier in the year when Bourlier was first appointed interim. They renewed a plea to the Justice Department for intervention in the prosecution, citing Bourlier's relative inexperience in handling major cases.

"In our opinion, the newly appointed CA and his similarly new, small staff – with an ample caseload apart from the indictment of Mr. Otieno's killers – are not adequately prepared to prosecute the eight defendants, all of whom have separate, experienced counsel," Crump and Krudys wrote in a June 29 letter to the Justice Department.

Both Crump and Krudys are well-known civil-rights attorneys. While Krudys has focused his attention mostly in Virginia, Crump has become involved in several high-profile cases involving the deaths of Black citizens at the hands of law enforcement.

Otieno's death, which drew comparisons to the 2020 death of George Floyd that sparked protests about racial inequity in justice, also caught the attention of civil-rights advocate Rev. Al Sharpton, who delivered the eulogy at Otieno's funeral March 29 in Chesterfield County.

Last month, the family's attorneys announced they had reached a settlement in a wrongful-death lawsuit they brought against Henrico Sheriff Alisa Gregory, Henrico County government and the commonwealth of Virginia, which operates Central State Hospital. The \$8.5 million settlement was brokered in part by Gov. Glenn Youngkin.

Youngkin spokesperson Macaulay Porter told The Progress-Index at the time that the governor intervened "with the hope that doing so proactively and fairly might alleviate in a small way some of the suffering that Irvo's mother and brother faced." Youngkin has faced criticism from Democrats and others for inaction in upgrading Virginia's behavioral-health system.

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The Progress-Index

NEWS

Governor announces support for 'Irvo's Law' giving families total access to loved ones in mental crisis



Bill Atkinson

Petersburg Progress-Index

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RICHMOND – Saying the system “failed” Irvo Noel Otieno and his family, Gov. Glenn Youngkin has proposed legislation allowing family members unfettered access to loved ones amid a mental crisis inside an emergency room or hospital.

The proposal – one of several the governor announced Thursday afternoon at the Library of Virginia to address shortcomings in Virginia’s mental-health treatment system – was warmly received by Otieno’s mother, Caroline Ouko, and brother, Leon Ochieng.

Otieno, who would have been 29 years old on Dec. 17, died March 6, 2023, in an intake unit at Central State Hospital in Dinwiddie County. The Henrico resident, who suffered from mental illness, suffocated after Henrico County deputies and CSH security officers pinned him to the floor of the unit.

Henrico Police came to Otieno’s home on March 3 to investigate a neighbor’s claim that Otieno was involved in a burglary. At the time, Otieno was in the middle of a mental crisis, so authorities took him to Henrico Doctors Hospital.

His mother maintained that repeated requests to be with her son in the emergency room were ignored, even when Otieno was calling for her. Officers then took him out a rear entrance to Henrico County Jail’s west campus, where his family said Otieno was frequently mistreated by deputies despite his apparent catatonic state from not having his medications.

Surveillance video from CSH showed deputies practically carrying a shackled Otieno into the intake unit and placing him on the floor. When he moved, deputies and security guards immediately rolled him over and lay across him for upwards of 11 minutes claiming he was trying to escape.

“The system failed you,” Youngkin told Ouko and Ochieng, who attended the event and carried a portrait of their loved one. “The system failed Irvo.”

He predicted the bill would have “bipartisan unanimous support” in the General Assembly, despite Democrats holding slim majorities over Republicans in both the House of Delegates and Senate. After the event, The Progress-Index asked Youngkin to elaborate on his prediction.

“I believe this is going to be one of those bills where the secretary [of health and human services] and I cannot see any reason for anyone to disagree with,” Youngkin said. “And therefore, common sense will prevail, and the need to have a loved one and a trusted caregiver with someone who is experiencing a behavioral health crisis is just part of good health care.”

Otieno’s family met with reporters after the event, and Ouko was asked about the governor’s statement about bipartisan support.

“It’s just common sense for the whole family to be able to see their loved ones when they are in mental crisis,” she said, adding that both she and Ochieng will be lobbying the General Assembly for Irvo’s Law when the legislative session begins Jan. 10, 2024.

Originally, 10 people were indicted on second-degree murder charges in Otieno’s death, but the prosecution dropped the charges against two of the security guards after it was determined they had not played a significant role. Trials for the remaining defendants will begin next June in Dinwiddie Circuit Court and last through the rest of 2024.

Youngkin, who called Otieno “a promising young artist” in his remarks at the event, was instrumental in brokering the settlement of a civil suit the family brought against Henrico County, the sheriff’s office and the Department of Behavioral and Developmental Health Services, which operates CSH. That suit was settled for \$8.5 million.

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