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## 3rd suicide reported at county jail in 4 months

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A Holding Center inmate who had attempted "suicide by cop" just days ago was found hanging

from a bedsheet Wednesday, the third apparent suicide in Erie County's busy jail in the last

four months.

Dead is Jeremy Kiekbush, 29, of Amherst, who told authorities when they arrested him after

a domestic dispute and high-speed chase that he wished they had killed him, a police sergeant

said.

The hanging was confirmed by the State Commission of Correction. Robert A. Koch Jr., the

top official who runs the county jail system for Sheriff Timothy B. Howard, did not comment.

However, an Erie County report to the state commission indicates that Kiekbush was deemed a

low suicide risk and placed under general supervision, not constant watch, after his arrival

Tuesday evening in the Holding Center.

The Holding Center's brief report said Kiekbush had a history of drug abuse. When he

was

arrested Monday evening in Niagara County, deputies found baggies of heroin, two rocks of crack

cocaine, a hypodermic needle and other drug paraphernalia in his auto.

Kiekbush had left his home on Campbell Boulevard in Amherst at about 3:15 p.m. Monday after

a domestic incident. He reportedly told his wife he was never coming back. Amherst police

notified agencies in nearby Niagara County that he might harm himself and others.

Niagara County deputies stopped his car in Wilson just after 8:30 p.m., and a chase ensued

when he took off on Route 18 into Orleans County.

During the chase, Kiekbush turned off his auto's headlights and drove straight at two police vehicles that had joined the pursuit. The officers drove off the road to avoid a crash.

Kiekbush's auto spun out and landed in a ditch after hitting a mailbox.

Sgt. Jeffrey Waters of the Middleport Village Police Department said Kiekbush told him, "I

wished that other cop would have killed me," and repeated, "Shoot me, I've got a gun."

Waters was one of the officers run off the road. He said he had no doubt Kiekbush was

intent on running straight into him.

"He only had his running lights on, no headlights," Waters said. "I just had enough time to

get off the road. I turned on my overhead, and he swerved into my lane, and I quick pulled

into a driveway on the north side of the road. He came off the shoulder of the road and hit a

mailbox, and I thought someone shot at me."

After hitting the ditch, Kiekbush ran into a tree-lined field. Deputies and Waters found

him lying amid heavy thorn bushes.

Timothy Green, assistant police chief in Amherst, said Kiekbush was arraigned at 2 a.m.

Tuesday in Amherst, then held for about 16 hours in the town's lockup. He was driven to the

Holding Center at 6 p.m. Tuesday.

Throughout the recent spate of Holding Center suicides, County Attorney Cheryl A. Green has

maintained that the downtown jail needs no special attention from the suicide-prevention

expert whose services were offered by the U.S. Justice Department.

On her advice, County Executive Chris Collins and the sheriff continue to resist a Justice

Department lawsuit that seeks better conditions in the Holding Center and the county

Correctional Facility in Alden.

Green was not available to comment Wednesday, but there was no sign that Collins and Howard

would change course in the wake of Kiekbush's death.

Other county leaders disagree with their stance. When a Legislature committee Monday spent

three hours discussing suicides and other jail matters, Democratic Leader Maria R. Whyte of

Buffalo told Green that whatever jail officials are doing to prevent suicides, it is not

enough.

She urged Green to let the Justice Department's expert, Lindsay M. Hayes of the National

Center for Institutions and Alternatives, inspect the prevention measures at the Holding

Center and Correctional Facility. But Green called the Justice Department's request a tactic

to get in the door, and she stressed the agency's effort should be resisted.

Comptroller Mark C. Poloncarz called Green's legal advice some of the worst that Erie

County has ever received and called on her to resign. He said improvements could then be made

to the jail system and Erie County could lessen the risk of paying vast sums to settle

lawsuits from the families of suicide victims and others harmed by the abuses that federal

lawyers have cited.

"It is no longer an issue solely at the jails, but it is an absurdity that will cost we,

the taxpayers, millions in the long run," Poloncarz said. "It is based on the bad advice of

the county attorney. As such, I am calling for the resignation of the county attorney

immediately. This has to stop."

A day after Green argued in U.S. District Court on Dec. 16 that the Justice Department

lawsuit should be dismissed, Adam Murr, 31, of North Tonawanda, a bank robbery suspect, hanged

himself with shoelaces tied to a vent in his Holding Center cell. On Feb. 13, Daniel Nye, 26,

of Cheektowaga, tied shoelaces to a bar on his cell's window and hanged himself.

There also have been suicide attempts: A Holding Center inmate already on suicide watch

attempted suicide in January by swallowing a quantity of aspirin. At the Correctional Facility

last week, officers cut down an inmate who hanged himself. Green called the attempt a demand

for better housing and food, not a serious attempt to end his life.

Researchers say inmates commit suicide at a higher rate than society at large because

of

the large number of inmates with mental illness, the traumatic effect of incarceration and the

enforced withdrawal from alcohol and drugs. Nye might have been trying to recover from a

heroin addiction because he was found with a medicine that helps ease withdrawal symptoms.

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## Comments

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