

No ACSO Fault Found in Avery Inmate Death

Written by Steve Frank

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24th District Attorney Jerry Wilson released the results of their investigation into the death of an Avery jail inmate from last summer, a death that raised protests from friends and family of Walter Earl (Dood) Pritchard. Pritchard died July 10th as he was found deceased in his cell at the Avery County Jail, according to the release. The statement went on to say the afternoon prior, officers with the Avery County Sheriff's Department had been called to Pritchard's residence by an acquaintance. Upon arrival the officers found Mr. Pritchard apparently semi-conscious and being treated by emergency personnel. After a few moments Mr. Pritchard regained consciousness and began to act in a very aggressive manner toward the people there. After initial, unsuccessful attempts to subdue Pritchard officers used Tasers to stop his aggressive and erratic behavior. From that point, Pritchard continued to be at one moment passive and the next violent and aggressive. Each time officers used Tasers to subdue him. While there officers learned that Pritchard had earlier consumed a large variety and quantity of narcotics. Ultimately, after emergency personnel had finished, Mr. Pritchard was arrested. He went with the Avery officers peacefully and submitted to incarceration peacefully.

At the Avery County Jail, Pritchard was placed in a cell under around the clock observation. He was said to have slept through the night and appeared to be coherent and was up talking and moving about the next morning. Later the same day, though, he was observed in his cell unresponsive and declared dead a few hours later.

As per state law, the State Bureau of Investigation investigated the matter fully. Wilson said, "I have now reviewed the report of the SBI Investigation, and have also reviewed the report of the State Medical Examiner and the Avery County Coroner. As a result, I have concluded that the Avery County Sheriffs Office acted at all times appropriately and within the law in this matter. The force used by them was not excessive under the circumstances and was employed to protect the emergency personnel and others present at the scene." Family of Dood Pritchard had planned legal action against the Avery Sheriff's Office in the matter last summer.