



\*\*\*For Immediate Release\*\*\*

Captain Neil Weaver  
Government and Media Relations

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### **KCIRT investigation into Kitsap County Jail inmate's death complete**

**PORT ORCHARD** – Kitsap Critical Incident Response Team (KCIRT) investigators found no indication of criminal intent or criminal negligence on behalf of the involved Kitsap County Corrections officers relating to the events that lead to the death of Sean Michael Howell earlier this year.

Howell, 28, was arrested by the Bremerton Police Department on Friday, May 8, 2020, and booked into Kitsap County Jail for First-Degree Murder.

On Saturday, May 9, 2020, at around 10:30 a.m., Kitsap County Corrections Officers responded to an incident involving Howell, who was housed in a crisis cell, attempting to tamper with the cell's sprinkler system. Four corrections officers and one sergeant entered Howell's cell and attempted to restrain him with the intention of moving him to a different cell.

Howell began to resist violently. The responding corrections officers utilized their pepper spray and Taser – both of which had little to no effect on Howell. One of the responding corrections officers was hospitalized with injuries sustained during the incident. They were treated and released the same day.

The corrections officers were able to place Howell in a restraint chair, but as he was up righted, they realized Howell was no longer breathing. The officers and medical staff on site immediately began CPR and called for additional aid. Howell was transported to the hospital where he remained unresponsive.

Howell was removed from life support the morning of Friday, May 15, 2020. The Kitsap County Coroner's Office determined Howell's cause of death was "restraint asphyxia" and the manner of death was deemed homicide.

KCIRT was activated to investigate the use of force incident. The Bremerton Police Department originally took Howell into custody and the jail staff involved in this incident is employed by the Kitsap County Sheriff's Department. It was decided investigators from both BPD and KCSO would not be involved with the investigation. The Washington State Patrol (WSP) became the lead investigating agency with assistance from Port Orchard Police Department, Poulsbo Police Department and Shelton Police Department detectives.

Investigators interviewed a total of 19 corrections officers who either were involved or witnessed the incident, as well as four members of the jail nursing staff, the day of the incident.

In accordance with WAC 139-12-030:

- Two non-law enforcement community members were identified and included in the investigative process, to include being provided pre-copies of media releases, receiving regular briefings on the progress of the investigation and having access to the entire investigative file at the conclusion of the investigation.
- Investigators went through a vetting process to preclude conflict of interest and ensure credibility to participate in the investigation.
- A family liaison was assigned to Howell's next-of-kin and have remained in contact with them throughout the investigation.

The completed investigation was turned over to the Kitsap County Prosecutor's Office on Thursday, Nov. 5, 2020, for review of any charging decisions. Once an investigation is complete, all information that can be legally disclosed becomes available to the public through the public disclosure process.

Any inquiries into the original homicide case in which Howell was taken into custody for are to be directed to the Bremerton Police Department.

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