



BARBALUNGA FOR SHERIFF

Press Release: 7/18/22

"Justice That Works"

Pittsfield Inmate Dies in Jail Custody

BERKSHIRE COUNTY—One week ago, a 46 year-old Pittsfield woman died while in the custody of the Western Mass Regional Woman's Correctional Center. Berkshire County Sheriff candidate Alf Barbalunga called the death "another tragic example of why we need to bring Berkshire women in jail back home to Berkshire County."

"There has been no public accounting of the circumstances surrounding this inmate's death," Barbalunga charged. "Her death is part of a pattern of what happens to Berkshire residents who find themselves in state or county jails." Although the death occurred a week ago, no report of the incident has been made public by the Hampden County Jail or the Berkshire County Jail, which makes all female referrals to the WCC facility in Chicopee.

8 months ago, an inmate in pre-trial detention at the Berkshire County jail committed suicide in broad daylight, Barbalunga said. Staff at the Berkshire jail gave the 34 year old man a mental health screening, but mistakenly concluded the Adams resident "did not exhibit an elevated risk of harming himself." "The Sheriff should have coded this individual as a high alert, so he would have been monitored with increased frequency," Barbalunga explained. Instead, the man died just days after arriving at the jail.

In February of 2019, a 48-year-old Latino inmate of the Berkshire County Jail died at the Solomon Carter Fuller Mental Health Hospital in Boston, roughly 6 weeks after he had been admitted in Berkshire County jail. Sheriff Tom Bowler's staff responded to a public records request, withholding details of the death because it "was not a public record."

"In the past three and a half years, there have been 3 confirmed deaths and 1 escape related to Berkshire County inmates," Barbalunga noted. "An average of every 10 months there has been either a death or an escape under the supervision of Sheriff Tom Bowler and his Executive staff." An inmate's escape in 2019 lasted 3 days, and required the assistance of 5 local police departments, state police from 3 states, and the US Marshal's office. There was a second escape in 2013 under Bowler's watch.

"The public has the right to expect transparency and accountability from their Sheriff," Barbalunga concluded. "Escapes and deaths of people under the Sheriff's supervisions must be fully transparent and should be posted on the jail's website. We will work harder to ensure

that no one commits suicide on our watch, and no one escapes. Whatever happens, the public will know of any findings from my office."

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