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## Alameda County, Jail Health Care Company Settle Suit Over Inmate Beating Death



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By **Alex Emslie** (<http://www2.kqed.org/news/author/aemslie>)

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The Alameda County Board of Supervisors approved an \$8.3 million settlement today over the 2010 in-custody death of a man at Santa Rita Jail. The settlement also includes statewide changes to health care by Corizon Health Inc., a private company, and new training for Alameda County sheriff's deputies.

On Aug. 16, 2010, Martin Harrison died after a struggle with several deputies during which he was beaten and shocked repeatedly with Tasers.

A civil rights lawsuit on behalf of Harrison's family alleged a [Corizon Health](https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/2014/mar/15/corizon-needs-a-checkup-problems-with-privatized-correctional-healthcare/) (<https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/2014/mar/15/corizon-needs-a-checkup-problems-with-privatized-correctional-healthcare/>) licensed vocational nurse failed to properly classify Harrison to be monitored for severe alcohol withdrawal when he was processed into Santa Rita Jail in Dublin.

California law requires registered nurses to assess inmates at intake, and Corizon agreed to change staffing at correctional facilities throughout the state in the settlement, according to attorneys for Harrison's family.

“It was very important for us to stop Corizon from endangering jail inmates by staffing California jails with unqualified nurses,” Oakland civil rights attorney Michael Haddad said. “After jail deputies beat and Tasered their father to death, Martin Harrison’s children beat them in court to win the largest wrongful death settlement in a civil rights case in California history.”

Alameda County and Corizon will split the settlement cost, as they did in a [\\$1 million settlement](http://www.mercurynews.com/breaking-news/ci_24720755/santa-rita-jail-death-lawsuit-settles-1-million) ([http://www.mercurynews.com/breaking-news/ci\\_24720755/santa-rita-jail-death-lawsuit-settles-1-million](http://www.mercurynews.com/breaking-news/ci_24720755/santa-rita-jail-death-lawsuit-settles-1-million)) with Harrison’s youngest son in 2013.

Julia Sherwin, another attorney for Harrison’s family, said Alameda County had agreed to new health training for all sheriff’s deputies who have contact with inmates. She said the training includes how to recognize the symptoms of alcohol withdrawal so they can summon immediate medical treatment.

While the settlement agreement applies only to California, Sherwin said the RN requirement could spread to other states where Corizon provides inmate health care.

Federal Judge Jon Tigar will oversee the terms of the settlement, according to Haddad.

### **Subdued by Force**

The lawsuit filed in 2011 outlines Harrison’s decline into severe alcohol withdrawal in jail as he tried repeatedly to get treatment.

He became increasingly incoherent and on the morning of Aug. 16, three days after he was arrested in Oakland on a warrant for failure to appear in court for a DUI charge, deputies moved Harrison to an isolation cell. A deputy requested a mental health evaluation for Harrison later that afternoon, but a social worker did not respond until 7 p.m., after Harrison had been beaten.

A deputy noticed Harrison was screaming and had flooded his cell at about 6:30 p.m. When the deputy attempted to move Harrison to another cell, Harrison charged him and the deputy shot him with what would be the first of several Taser stuns.

In the ensuing struggle, deputies punched and kicked Harrison and repeatedly shocked him with Tasers. When Harrison was finally subdued, deputies took him to another cell and restrained him with a waist chain, leg shackles, handcuffs and a “spit hood.”

Harrison became unresponsive while a nurse was examining him soon after the struggle. He never woke up and died two days later at Valley Care Hospital. A coroner’s report found Harrison died after suffering “cardiac arrest following excessive physical exertion, multiple blunt injuries and Taser.”

The Alameda County Sheriff’s Department had found that deputies acted appropriately in restraining Harrison.

The sheriff’s department did not immediately respond to a request for comment about the settlement.

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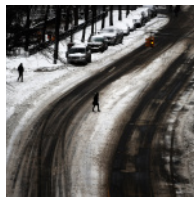
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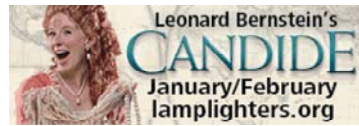
ALEX EMSLIE



Alex Emslie is a news reporter focused on criminal justice policy, policing and legal issues. He left Colorado and a career as a carpenter in 2008 to study journalism at community college in San Francisco. He then graduated from San Francisco State University's journalism program with a minor in criminal justice studies. Emslie contributed to several Bay Area newspapers and online news outlets before joining KQED in 2013. He loves multimedia reporting, publishing source documents and transparency. He can be reached at aemslie@kqed.org and followed via @SFNewsReporter.

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