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# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

November 21, 2016

The Honorable Loretta Lynch  
Attorney General  
United States Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Lynch,

I write to inform you of recent disturbing reports of inadequate healthcare at the Milwaukee County Jail in my congressional district. Since April of this year, numerous deaths were reported at the Milwaukee County Jail. I am asking for an independent investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice of the Milwaukee County Jail.

Based on recent events, I am concerned that Milwaukee County is failing its constitutional obligations to our inmates. As you know, the United States Constitution guarantees prisoners the right to be free from cruel and unusual punishment under the Eighth Amendment. In *Estelle v. Gamble*, the United States Supreme Court held that prisoners have a right to healthcare. As Justice Kennedy wrote in a separate 2011 decision, "Just as a prisoner may starve if not fed, he or she may suffer or die if not provided adequate medical care. A prison that deprives prisoners of basic sustenance, including adequate medical care, is incompatible with the concept of human dignity and has no place in civilized society."

Last month, inmate Michael Madden died overnight in the Milwaukee County Jail. Details surrounding the death are still being examined; however, this tragedy is not an isolated event. In April, a mentally ill inmate named Terrill Thomas died in his cell due to dehydration. Witnesses claimed the water had been shut off for days, and they heard Mr. Thomas beg for water. Another incident involved the death of a newborn baby in July who, according to the mother, was not given medical attention after she notified staff she had gone into labor. Finally, in late August Kristina Fiebrink passed away in her cell, details of which are still unknown to the public.

Based on these incidents and subsequent reporting, I fear that Milwaukee County Jail is an unsafe environment for its inmates. Last month, an in-depth article by the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, titled "Shortage of Medical Staff Plagues Milwaukee Jails," reported that a private contractor, Armor Correctional Health Services in charge of care at the Milwaukee County Jail, "failed to meet basic standards of care and staffing mandates, putting inmates' health at risk . . ." Chief among the issues reported were inadequate staffing levels especially among psychiatrists and full time permanent nurses.

According to a May report, 30% of medical jobs in two county correctional facilities were vacant. Based on monthly staffing reports, these shortage problems have yet to be adequately addressed.

My constituents and I lack confidence that current county officials, especially Sherriff David Clarke who oversees the facility and advocated for Armor's contract in 2013, will be unbiased and willing to address the serious concerns raised by these tragic circumstances and reports. I am aware that the Department of Justice has authority to investigate state and local jails for systemic civil rights violations, and I ask you to look into this matter further.

Sincerely,



Gwen Moore

MEMBER OF CONGRESS