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Buckfire Law Wins Jail Death Trial Against Corizon Health's Employees

SOUTHFIELD, Mich.—(BUSINESS WIRE)—A six-person jury handed down a \$6.4 million verdict against Corizon Health's employees in a federal court trial in Lansing, Mich. The wrongful death lawsuit was filed Jan. 14, 2020, and the verdict was rendered on Dec. 1, 2022. Attorneys Jennifer Damico and Sarah Gorski of The Buckfire Law Firm tried the case to verdict after three weeks of witness testimony. Corizon Health is a privately held prison healthcare contractor in the United States. The company provides healthcare to approximately 28 clients in 15 states, including 139 state prisons, municipal jails, and other facilities. The company is headquartered in Brentwood, Tenn. Corizon had contracted with Kent County to provide medical care and treatment to inmates at the Kent County Correctional Facility in Grand Rapids, Mich. The lawsuit alleged Wade Jones died from grossly mismanaged serious alcohol withdrawal syndrome due to the deliberate indifference of the healthcare company's employees in violation of his federal rights under the United States Constitution. "Delirium tremens is a known, fatal and preventable complication of alcohol withdrawal. No one should die from alcohol withdrawal syndrome if properly managed. Mr. Jones was at the mercy of the Corizon medical staff. He could not leave. He could not go to an emergency department on his own," Damico said. "The Defendants had numerous chances to save his life. They made conscious and repeated decisions to not act — and the Jury found their conduct to rise to the level of deliberate indifference." Mr. Jones was serving a five-day sentence for third-degree retail fraud (theft of under \$100.00). Four hours after he was booked into the jail, Mr. Jones began to exhibit signs and symptoms of alcohol withdrawal. Despite this life-threatening condition and clearly exhibiting behaviors consistent with a medical emergency, Mr. Jones was not afforded appropriate health care for his known, serious medical condition by the Corizon medical staff. On April 27, 2018, he suffered a cardiac arrest after being transferred to jail infirmary, instead of a hospital. After his arrest, he was transported to Spectrum Butterworth Hospital, and he was declared brain dead on May 2, 2018. The lawsuit alleged violations of Mr. Jones' Eighth Amendment right, which imposes duties on prison officials, including privately contracted healthcare companies to provide humane conditions of confinement. Prison officials must ensure that inmates receive adequate food, clothing, shelter, and medical care, and must "take reasonable measures to guarantee the safety of the inmates." The suit alleged the Corizon Health employees acted with deliberate indifference to Mr. Jones by denying him reasonable and adequate medical care and treatment. The lawsuit further alleged that the Corizon employees were professionally negligent under Michigan law. After several days of deliberation, the jury returned a unanimous verdict of \$6.4 million, against three Defendants, on Plaintiff's claim for deliberate indifference to his serious medical needs. The award included \$3 million for Mr. Jones' pain and suffering damages prior to his death, the sum of \$400,000 for his family's past loss of society and companionship, and \$3 million for the future loss of companionship suffered by his family. Mr. Jones was survived by his parents and siblings, all of whom testified at the trial.

About Buckfire Law Firm

The Buckfire Law Firm is in Southfield, Mich. Founded in 1969 by David Buckfire, the firm specializes in cases involving catastrophic injuries and wrongful death. The law firm is recognized for having the highest degree of skill and integrity and as U.S. News Best Lawyers® Best Law Firms by U.S. News and World Reports. Jennifer Damico is a skilled trial lawyer with 28 years of experience.