

# Chicago Tribune

## NEWS

### **Ex-warden notes errors in death Hypothermia killed inmate**

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A former prison warden in southern Illinois who was fired last month without explanation by state officials detailed in a recent interview mistakes made by his staff early last Dec. 25, when an inmate from McHenry County froze to death in his cell.

Eugene McAdory Jr. said he did everything he could to investigate the death of Charles Platcher at Menard Correctional Center and to make changes that would prevent a similar incident. Nonetheless, he said, top officials in the Illinois Department of Corrections used Platcher's death as an excuse to get rid of him.

The most serious problem revealed by McAdory was a nurse's failure to follow up on Platcher's incoherent response from a cell in the prison's medical unit about 4 a.m. While the ex-warden stopped short of blaming Platcher's death on the nurse, he called the incident "tragic" and a "mistake."

Platcher, 31, was pronounced dead about 8 1/2 hours later at Memorial Hospital in nearby Chester. A Randolph County coroner's jury ruled in March that Platcher died of hypothermia and called the death accidental.

Platcher had been serving a 40-year term for stabbing his mother to death in 2001 in their Oakwood Hills home.

McAdory said that in the months after Platcher's death, he was given conflicting guidance by top Department of Corrections officials regarding discipline of staff members and whether to discuss details of the case with Platcher's father.

At a meeting Jan. 20 with department Chief of Staff Dennis Cooper, McAdory said, he was told his firing of a nurse and other disciplinary action were proper. Months later, McAdory said, he was criticized by department officials for not consulting with them.

McAdory criticized Cooper and department Director Roger Walker Jr. for not visiting Menard after Platcher's death to find out for themselves what steps could be taken to prevent it from happening again.

Although department spokesman Sergio Molina confirmed McAdory's account of Platcher's final hours, he declined to comment on the circumstances of his firing or discuss conversations McAdory had with others in the department about Platcher.

Molina stood by comments he made after McAdory's firing, when he said the Department of Corrections does not have to give an explanation for firing a warden, who serves "at the pleasure" of the director. He declined to say whether McAdory was fired because of the circumstances surrounding Platcher's death.

But McAdory said the department used Platcher's death as an excuse to fire him. He believes that everything he did to investigate Platcher's death and fix problems was appropriate and that he should not have been fired.

"None of these guys came down to the facility to offer support or ask questions, to see if we needed anything," McAdory said, referring to Cooper and Walker. "All they did was point fingers and blame."

Molina said McAdory's criticism of them is unfounded. Efforts to contact Cooper and Walker were not successful.

Top officials do not visit each prison after a problem, Molina said. During the Platcher investigation, Ronald Meek, the deputy director in charge of District 4, where Menard is located, visited the prison several times, Molina said.

Molina said the Platcher investigation also led to disciplinary action within the last month against Pam Grubman, the health-care administrator at Menard.

McAdory, who did not agree that Grubman deserved to be disciplined, said it was because inspection reports of the medical facilities were not properly completed in November. McAdory did not know the disciplinary action taken against Grubman because it happened after he was fired, and Molina would not say. Grubman could not be reached for comment.

McAdory said he waited to speak publicly about the case until Randolph County prosecutors finished their investigation. State's Atty. Darrell Williamson determined this month that there was not sufficient evidence to bring criminal charges, a decision with which McAdory agrees.

On Dec. 15, Platcher declined to visit with his father and made suicidal comments, McAdory said. That's when he was transferred to the medical unit and placed on suicide watch.

Platcher's clothes were removed, and he was given a special blanket that cannot be used to hang oneself. Someone checked on him every 10 minutes through the cell's food slot.

By Dec. 21, four days before his death, Platcher began sleeping on the floor of his cell. McAdory said Platcher did not appear to be harming himself, so he was allowed to continue.

Unknown to prison staff at the time, McAdory said, the heat in three cells in the medical unit at Menard went out about 2 a.m. Dec. 25.

McAdory denied claims by Platcher's family that the prison staff wore winter clothes because of the heating problem. He also denied claims by the family that Platcher had been thrown down metal stairs or had a sock stuffed in his mouth.