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Inmate Says Guards Didn't Help Victim

By Andrew Smith

STAFF WRITER

John MacDonald could see plainly that fellow Nassau County jail inmate Christopher Jackson wasn't doing well in the spring of 1998, MacDonald testified yesterday.

"Me and the other inmates saw Chris coughing," said MacDonald, who now has 12 days left on his prison sentence. "He started spitting blood."

MacDonald said he ran to the aid station at the jail's recreation room and asked correction officers to check on Jackson, 28, of Locust Valley. MacDonald said he got a familiar response.

"They told us they would, but to mind our own business," MacDonald said. "I tried to comfort Chris until the correction officers came, but they never came."

After increasingly severe crises related to Jackson's sickle cell anemia, Jackson died about a month later. His family is suing the jail and Nassau County Medical Center for \$50 million, saying they violated his civil rights and committed medical malpractice.

MacDonald, 37, a two-time burglar, testified before U.S. District Judge Leonard Wexler in Central Islip.

After Jackson died, the state Commission of Correction criticized the jail's treatment of him.

Jackson's mother, Greta Jackson, testified that things went no better for her son at the hospital, located next door to the East Meadow jail.

The county's attorney, Paul Millus of Manhattan, has argued that Jackson's death was the unfortunate but unavoidable result of a severe genetic illness that kills many young people.

During cross-examination by Millus, Jackson acknowledged that her son visited emergency rooms sometimes once a month, and was admitted to hospitals at least once a year. He suffered a stroke when he was 12 years old, she said.

But during questioning by her attorney, Frederick Brewington of Hempstead, she said the jail did little to help her son. It sent him to the hospital only after she made a series of frantic calls to jail officials when she saw her son was listless and had a racing heartbeat.

He improved there for a time, but about a week later, Jackson said a doctor called to tell her they were transferring her son to intensive care. The doctor told her Jackson had been prescribed morphine for his pain and that he was "very drowsy." The doctor repeated that phrase, and Jackson said that set off alarms in her head.

"I asked if they overdosed him on morphine," she said. "He said, 'Yes.' Then he said he could say no more."

He continued to be transferred back and forth from the hospital and the jail until he suffered a stroke, which ultimately led to his death.