

I-Team: Embattled Nassau County Jail Health Services Provider Sued Over Alleged Neglect

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A robbery defendant who says he suffered a broken jaw and was denied medical care at the Nassau County Correctional Center has filed a federal lawsuit against the jail's medical provider claiming the company neglected to treat his injury and failed to send him to the hospital for two weeks.

The lawsuit is the [latest in a string of neglect claims](#) against Armor Correctional Healthcare, a for-profit firm paid to treat injured and sick detainees at the jail.

Meanwhile, a source with knowledge of the matter tells the I-Team the New York Attorney General's office has issued subpoenas to Armor officials.

In a federal lawsuit filed Thursday, Matthew Matteo, a Roosevelt man who has since pleaded guilty to robbery, says a corrections officer hit him in October 2013, breaking his jaw. Matteo says instead of being sent to the hospital for surgery, he was held in a cell for two weeks without being given so much as a pain killer.

"I didn't eat nothing, just water. I couldn't chew nothing. I couldn't even chew bread," Matteo said in an interview with the I-Team.

Two weeks later, Matteo's father contacted a jail chaplain and the two intervened to get Matteo taken to a hospital, the inmate said. Doctors wired Matteo's jaw shut and later operated on his jaw, inserting a screw and a metal plate to repair the damage, according to the lawsuit.

Armor declined to answer the I-Team's questions about Matteo's case specifically, citing privacy laws. But the company issued a general response disputing Matteo's claims.

"Our review of Mr. Matteo's treatment reveals that he was provided prompt and appropriate medical and psychiatric attention and treatment in conformity with community standards on each and every occasion that treatment was indicated over his multiple incarcerations at the Nassau County Correctional Center,"Armor spokeswoman Yeleny Suarez wrote.

The New York Commission of Correction has reprimanded Armor at least four times in reports for mismanaging the treatment of inmates who died in the company's care. In two recent reports on inmate deaths, the commission said Armor has engaged in "a pattern of inadequate and neglectful medical care."

Despite the inquiries from state regulators and complaints from prisoners' families and lawyers, the Nassau County Legislature renewed Armor's \$11 million contract six months ago without putting it out to bid. As recently as three months ago, Sheriff spokesman publicly praised Armor for "enhanced inmate health services."

Since then, county officials have backed away from their endorsement of the company. In a statement to the I-Team this week, Carnell Fosky, an attorney for the county, said the county has looked into canceling the contract it just renewed, but found it would be too expensive.

"The administration takes all allegations seriously," Fosky wrote. "The County Attorney's Office has opined that the County cannot cancel the Armor contract without subjecting taxpayers to significant liability as the allegations have not been substantiated to date. Last month, the County began drafting a Request for Proposals (RFP) to provide inmate health care services at the Correctional Center. That said, the RFP drafting process is a lengthy process."

Nassau County legislator Kevan Abrahams (D-Freeport), raised concerns about the Armor contract before it was renewed. He says he felt pressured to approve the renewal because the sheriff's office said prisoners might go without medical care if the contract lapsed.

"Unfortunately I think it's too little too late," Abrahams said. "We should have cut ties with Armor some time ago."


Abrahams says County Executive Edward Mangano should have been looking to drop the medical firm before it committed to a new contract.

"It sounds like the county executive and the correctional center just started to do their homework, and now they're realizing that everything we were told was rumor has some fact to it," he said.

Matteo's lawyer, Frederick Brewington, says proper mental health treatment might have prevented his client's broken jaw in the first place. Matteo's father said prior to the fight, with a correction officer Armor never gave Matthew medication to treat his bipolar disorder. That made Matteo unstable, and put correction officers at risk too, the father said.

Brewington said without medication, a judge found Matteo unfit to stand trial. He was sent to a state psychiatric facility for a month to stabilize, a stay that was paid for by taxpayers.

"The unfortunate thing is that the impact is not only to Matthew, although it's primarily to Matthew," Brewington said. "It affects his family. It affects the entire concept of justice. And it affects the taxpayers as well."



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