

Nassau jail issues mount

The family of Michael Cullum, the sixth Nassau jail inmate to die in custody this year, is seeking a full investigation of the circumstances surrounding his death. “If they gave him his medication like he should have had, he would be with us right now,” Cullum’s sister, Dorothy, of Glen Cove told Newsday last week.

The family has retained attorney Frederick Brewington of Hempstead, who in an interview said that denying medication to Cullum, who had multiple medical issues, amounted to “torture and a death sentence by neglect.”

Representatives for the county, jail and Armor Correctional Health Services, Nassau’s inmate medical care provider, said last week that they couldn’t go into detail about Cullum’s death because of confidentiality issues.

Still, there’s a familiar ring to the family’s allegation that Cullum did not get medication — and it’s part of a federal lawsuit filed against Armor by state Attorney General Eric T. Schnei-



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derman.

There was plentiful news about Nassau’s jail last week:

- The death of Cullum, who had been taken to Nassau University Medical Center for treatment.

- A Sunday night melee at the jail that sent nine correction officers to the hospital with bumps and bruises — prompting Sheriff Michael Sposato to order the facility locked down until last Tuesday morning.

- And a threat from Armor to pull out of its contract early, with 30 days’ notice — unless George Maragos, Nassau’s comptroller, reversed course and released more than \$1 million in payments the company contends it is owed.

On Friday, Maragos released a partial payment, which, according to a spokesman for County Executive Edward Mangano, was enough to keep the vendor from walking, for now.

“After discussions with Armor this morning regarding the July payment, we do not anticipate notice of termination today,” spokesman Brian Nevin said. An Armor spokeswoman wouldn’t comment Friday about whether the company planned to terminate its contract.

Still, with so much happening, it’s fair to ask:

What the heck is going on in Nassau’s jail?

At some point, between lawsuits by families of four inmates who died and investigations by the state Commission of Correction, we’ll learn more.

On the issue of medical care, the attorney general’s lawsuit, which Armor has said it intends to vigorously fight, notes other allegations that inmates did not get requested medication or treatment — sometimes despite repeated requests and, on a few occasions, because their files could not be located.

In one affidavit, William Hine, who was in custody last year, recounts a conversation he said he had with a nurse at

the jail. “The nurse asked me why I brought all of my empty pill bottles for my prescriptions and vitamins and later commented, ‘You won’t be getting all of those here, you will be lucky to get Motrin.’”

Brewington said he had another client who is alleging similar treatment.

“There is a level of inhumanity that overshadows all of this,” Brewington said. “What has been allowed to happen is that the quality of care has been eroded simply because the individuals are in custody.”

Mangano, in an interview last week, said he had received nothing from the sheriff indicating problems with Armor’s performance. That’s why the county — despite requests from Democratic lawmakers and others — never exercised its option to end the contract with 30 days’ notice, Mangano said.

At some point, however, the company, which has said it will not bid on a new contract, will be gone. But the county, because of lawsuits, will be dealing with the fallout, likely for years to come.



Michael Cullum, sixth inmate to die this year at Nassau jail.