

Latest to Die in Portland's Jails Is a 31-Year-Old Woman With History of Mental Illness

Court records show Asia Williams had been in and out of hospitals and jails for years.

 Expand



Multnomah County Detention Center in downtown Portland. (Brian Burk)

By [Lucas Manfield](#)

July 29, 2024 at 3:17 pm PDT

Asia Williams died Thursday morning at Portland's downtown jail. She was 31 years old.

The Multnomah County Sheriff's Office released her name this afternoon and said it would give no further information about how she died, other than that she was found unresponsive in her cell at 7:30 am. Her court record shows she had long suffered from mental illness, drug addiction and homelessness. She had spent time at the state's psychiatric hospital, which is so overburdened by Oregon's lack of alternative treatment options that it has begun releasing patients early.

Portland's jails have been particularly deadly in recent years. There have been 11 deaths since the beginning of 2022. Officials point to the increasing prevalence of severe mental illness and the smuggling in of powerful street drugs.

Williams latest stint in county lockup began last Tuesday, July 22, when she was arrested on suspicion of being involved in a fire two months earlier at an apartment building downtown, police say. Portland Fire & Rescue identified the building as the The Katherine Gray, an affordable housing apartment building run by Central City Concern.

Williams' run-ins with police, often the result of poverty or mental illness, go back more than a decade. She has been repeatedly ordered into mental health treatment.

Twice, she was arrested for assaulting security guards after refusing to leave her bed at various hospitals. The second time, in 2020, was at Legacy's specialized psychiatric facility, Unity.

In a series of letters submitted to the court earlier this year, Williams said her life was on the upswing. Medication had helped, and she was enrolled in a recovery program at Central City Concern.

But she was arrested the next month walking out of Target with bags full of unpaid merchandise, and was eventually held in jail after the apartment fire. Her court-appointed lawyer did not return WW's call.

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D

DG

8 months ago

Oregon needs to spend some time thinking about how it provides mental health care to those most in need and who have the fewest resources. Our current model (such as it is) is broken. What worries me is that forward momentum has to be maintained, and that momentum will be more and more difficult to sustain as other issues and crises come to the fore. Not to mention that time and money is going to be spent on a population that most people aren't concerned with or is unpopular. Factor in that tax money will be an issue and there will be forces that want to cut funding. I don't hold out a lot of hope.

5 0 Reply

H

Henry Rearden → DG

8 months ago

Why then are you still voting for the exact same politicians who have under-prioritized and underfunded Mental/Behavioral Health for the past 60 years? Oregon already has the money, they just choose to spend it on bright shiny toys and priorities de jour instead of the general welfare.

1 2 Reply

H

HighDesertRanger → Henry Rearden 8 months ago

Never question the enlightened western oregon voter. They are so worldly, look at their crown jewel of progressive policies: Portland, Oregon.

1 0 Reply

D

DG → Henry Rearden

8 months ago

Interesting... you've seen my completed ballots have you? Please tell me how I've voted in the past 5 elections Henry. Since you seem to know

1 2 Reply



sscamaro16 → DG

8 months ago

Cute game but unconvincing. Your commentary is supportive of all-things-progressive so knowing "how you vote" is irrelevant.

0 1 Reply

D

DG → sscamaro16

8 months ago

Last time you tried to claim something was irrelevant... you had your hat handed to you. And again.. if you give in to purely emotional arguments, as you seem to, then of course you

emotional arguments, as you seem to, then of course you believe how I vote is irrelevant. How do you know that I'm supportive of all thing Progressive? You don't. But ignorance the facts has never stopped you before.

1 0 Reply ↗

H

HighDesertRanger → DG 8 months ago —

Because you are supportive of all things progressive.

0 0 Reply ↗

D

DG → HighDesertRanger 8 months ago —

All things? You don't know that.

0 0 Reply ↗



sscamaro16 → DG —

8 months ago

Only in your fantasies. But you still can't run from your commentary.

0 1 Reply ↗

D

DG → sscamaro16 —

8 months ago

Why would I want to run from my commentaries? Not my fault that you over-generalize.

0 0 Reply ↗

L

Leonard Newhouse → DG —

8 months ago

As you keep voting for progressive failures.....

1 2 Reply ↗

D

DG → Leonard Newhouse —

8 months ago

Well, both you and Henry seem to know who I voted for. Maybe Henry doesn't have the printout of my votes, and you do. Do you have it Leonard? Can you tell me how I voted in the past 5 elections?

0 0 Reply ↗

L

Leonard Newhouse → DG 8 months ago —

It's obvious, bleeding heart moron

0 2 Reply ↗



Mid County

8 months ago

Yet another example of why the mentally ill, drug/alcohol addled and medically frail have no place in our jails. You won't find a Corrections worker or Sheriff who'll disagree.

2 0 Reply



barefoot2626

8 months ago

Nothing more?

That her life was not good enough for a response?

What was the manner of death?

2 0 Reply



Mid County → barefoot2626

8 months ago

Still early, but then again while WW touts their deep hitting investigative journalism, they probably didn't ask.

1 0 Reply



barefoot2626 → Mid County

8 months ago

It's not early. After two days... it is late.

0 0 Reply



Mid County → barefoot2626 8 months ago

Depends on how fast the Medical Examiner and Detectives are able to track down next of kin and get their ok to release the info. If they say no, then no info will be forthcoming.

If they are able to release the info, I'd give it within the week

0 0 Reply



barefoot2626 → Mid County 8 months ago

...yes... but....

0 0 Reply



HNL-PDX → barefoot2626

8 months ago

You know that never happens especially to taxpayers.

0 0 Reply 



Kyle Hanson

8 months ago

Oh Wow!! This wasn't even a story What was the point, just running her name thru the m Hell, man, she's dead. Leave her alone now.

0 0 Reply 



Kyle Hanson

8 months ago

Well, AT LEAST SHE HAD A PUBLIC PRETENDER.

0 0 Reply 



Lola

8 months ago

Eleven deaths since 2022!?

