

Suit claims Allegheny County Jail inattention caused miscarriage

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In a lawsuit filed over the weekend, a Canonsburg woman claimed that she didn't get adequate treatment for her pregnancy while she was in the Allegheny County Jail, resulting in a miscarriage less than three weeks after her arrest.

Loni Mori, 33, was arrested in October 2011 on charges of drug possession and retail theft, one of a series of similar criminal cases against her since 2004 and extending into mid-2012.

"She had a drug problem," attorney Elmer Robert Keach III said, "and she's kicked it, and she's out in the community and working hard and every day is out there bawling because she lost her child."

Mr. Keach, along with attorney Robert N. Peirce III, filed the complaint in U.S. District Court, where the two also are litigating another case involving the death in 2010 of Amy Lynn Gillespie, a 27-year-old pregnant inmate who died after, the lawyers allege, her pneumonia was misdiagnosed by jail doctors.

The complaint names the county, several former and current jail managers, jail medical provider Allegheny Correctional Health Services, and that nonprofit entity's chief operations officer Dana Phillips.

The complaint said that Ms. Mori was admitted to the jail Oct. 16, 2011, and was about 7 1/2 months pregnant with what would have been her first child.

The jail sent her to Magee-Womens Hospital of UPMC, according to the complaint, where she stayed for five days and learned that the fetus' vital

signs were normal. According to the complaint, the hospital recommended a follow-up ultrasound at the jail, but that was never administered.

Back at the jail on Nov. 2, according to the complaint, Ms. Mori noticed vaginal bleeding, or spotting, and asked for medical attention for that, and her daily dose of methadone, a drug used to avert heroin withdrawal. At the jail infirmary she wasn't offered any care for the bleeding, she alleged.

That evening, her pain and bleeding got worse, but when she repeatedly pushed the cell call button, a corrections officer threatened to lock her down, according to the complaint. It said the fetus stopped moving the next day, and Ms. Mori was taken by police car to Magee, where she was told that her placenta had separated from the uterine wall, which ended the pregnancy.

Ms. Mori, they wrote, remains childless.

Mr. Keach and Mr. Peirce have deposed jail and infirmary officials in the Gillespie case, and they claim in Ms. Mori's complaint that county officials pressured Allegheny Correctional Health Services to push down costs. In response, Ms. Phillips "instituted a 'policy' requiring her personal approval for all outside medical trips," the attorneys wrote in the complaint. Sometimes, they wrote, Ms. Phillips "overruled the directions of physicians" and opted not to send inmates to hospitals.

"At this juncture, it is fair to characterize [Allegheny Correctional] as orchestrating a facility that causes unnecessary suffering and death amongst individuals who have no capability to provide for themselves," they wrote in the complaint.

Ms. Phillips could not be reached for comment.

In October, Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald's administration announced that it would invite private firms to bid on the job of providing health care at the jail -- a service that typically costs \$11 million a year. The county continues to craft its request for proposals, according to county spokeswoman Amie Downs. "We just want to make sure that we're not leaving large items out that should be part of it," said

Ms. Downs, adding that the county has brought in several medical experts to hone the effort.

Allegheny Correctional, created in 2000, has been targeted by lawsuits from former inmates and families of dead inmates who have claimed that inadequate care amounts to cruel and unusual punishment. Ms. Mori's lawsuit claims that the county showed deliberate indifference to her medical needs, depriving her of civil rights, and demands compensatory and punitive damages.

"Loni Mori's baby shouldn't have died here," Mr. Keach said. "If any of those people [cared] about her, her baby would've been saved."