

Aaron Hernandez's Prison Suicide Evidence Will Be Kept, Judge Rules

A Massachusetts state judge on Friday ordered prison officials to preserve any evidence collected from the cell of former National Football League star Aaron Hernandez, according to court documents, two days after he was found dead of an apparent suicide.

Lawyers for Hernandez's family had sought the ruling to ensure they can conduct their own investigation into his death at the Souza-Baranowski Correctional Center in Lancaster, Massachusetts.

A lawyer for the state correction department told Superior Court Judge Thomas McGuire in New Bedford, Massachusetts, that the maximum-security prison was already keeping any evidence, making a formal order unnecessary, *The Boston Globe* reported on Friday. But the judge said he would issue one regardless.

Investigators have formally ruled Hernandez's death a suicide. It remains unclear why the 27-year-old hanged himself at the prison, where he was serving life for the 2013 murder of an acquaintance.

His death came just days after he was acquitted at trial of separate double-murder charges.

Authorities said on Thursday three handwritten notes were found near a Bible in his cell, though their contents were not made public.

The attorney for Hernandez's family, George Leontire, said none of them had received a "scintilla of information about what transpired in his death," including the contents of the

notes, the Globe reported.

The family is seeking the contents of Hernandez's cell, the bedsheet he used to hang himself and recordings of emergency phone calls related to his medical treatment, among other items.

Hernandez, a New England Patriots tight end, was considered among the best at his position when he was arrested in June 2013 for murdering Odin Lloyd.

His lawyers are also expected to ask a court to vacate his 2015 murder conviction. Under Massachusetts state law, convictions are typically vacated for defendants who die before their appeals can be heard.

Hernandez's appeal was still pending at the time of his death.

Lloyd's mother has filed a wrongful death lawsuit against Hernandez. On Friday, she and her attorney, Douglas Sheff, called on the Patriots to give \$6 million to Hernandez's estate that could be turned over to his victims' families.

"We want to provide the Patriots with the opportunity to become something more—not just champions of football but to become champions of justice," Sheff said.

The \$6 million is roughly the amount of guaranteed money owed under Hernandez's contract at the time of his arrest. The Patriots voided the deal soon after the arrest. {eo}

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