

Missouri Lawyers

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WEEKLY

■ \$1 MILLION SETTLEMENT

New Madrid County settles in woman's suicide at now-closed jail

WRONGFUL DEATH

■ **Venue:** U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri

■ **Case Number/Date:** 1:16-cv00117/ Dec. 22, 2017

■ **Judge:** Audrey G. Fleissig

■ **Caption:** Estate of Stephanie Goodrich v. New Madrid County

■ **Plaintiff's Expert:** Dr. Melissa Ussery, Springfield (medical – psychological)

■ **Insurer:** MOPERM

■ **Plaintiff's Attorneys:** Stephen E. Walsh, Walsh & Walsh, Poplar Bluff; Shaun D. Hanschen, Blanton, Nickell, Collins, Douglas & Hanschen, Sikeston

■ **Defendant's Attorney:** Albert M. Spradling III, Spradling & Spradling, Cape Girardeau

By SCOTT LAUCK
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The family of a woman who died in an understaffed jail settled a wrongful-death lawsuit for \$1 million, according to figures that New Madrid County provided in response to an open-records request.

On Dec. 13, 2013, Stephanie Goodrich was arrested on suspicion of drunken-driving after she was involved in a two-car crash.

After she was booked at the New Madrid County Jail, she was made to change into an orange jumpsuit, but she was allowed to keep her long, gray socks. She later used them to hang herself in her cell.

Goodrich, 41, was a nurse at a Poplar Bluff hospital who had two teenage sons. An attorney for the family, Stephen E. Walsh of Walsh & Walsh in Poplar Bluff, said she had never been arrested before and was distraught due to a recent relationship.

In a federal lawsuit, Goodrich's family alleged that the jail failed to follow its own screening and intake policies. Goodrich had a 0.16 percent blood-alcohol content, so she should have been monitored every 15 minutes. The jail was so understaffed, however, that no one was on duty for several hours early on the morning of Dec. 14, when she hanged herself, according to the lawsuit.

U.S. District Judge Audrey G. Fleissig approved a confidential settlement of the family's wrongful-death claims on Dec. 22, slightly more than four years after

Goodrich's death. Walsh, citing the confidentiality provisions, refused to provide the amount of the settlement.

Clement Cravens County Clerk provided the amount to Missouri Lawyers Weekly, however, pursuant to a request under the Missouri Sunshine Law, which requires "the amount of any moneys paid by, or on behalf of, the public governmental body shall be disclosed" when a settlement is sealed by a court.

The jail closed for renovations a year after Goodrich's death and has not reopened. Walsh said inmates have been housed in jails in other nearby counties since then. Walsh said that, as part of the settlement, the county agreed to undergo mandatory jail-safety training and jail-suicide detection and prevention if the jail ever reopens or a new jail is built. The training would be supervised by Dr. Melissa Ussery, the director of medical services for the Greene County Sheriff's Office, who testified in the case. mo