

Lawsuit Claims Geo Group's Indifference to Health and Safety Led to Prison Suicide

Lawsuit alleges Geo Group, one of the world's largest private prison mgmt. companies, violated a 21-year-old detainee's 14th Amendment right to due process.

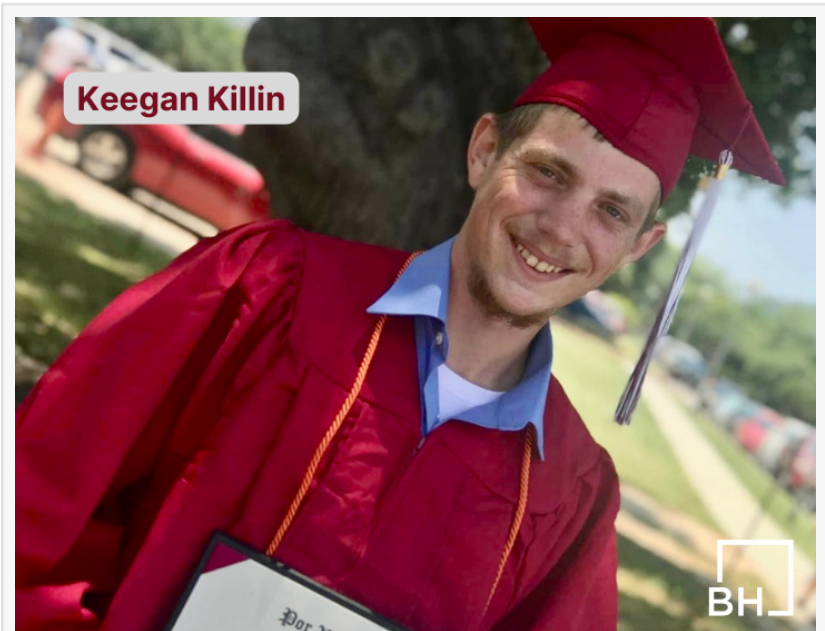
DEL RIO, TEXAS, UNITED STATES, July 14, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Attorneys from the law firm of Baum Hedlund Aristei & Goldman have filed a [wrongful death lawsuit](#) on behalf of Jennifer Guadarrama, a mother who alleges numerous failures by private prison giant Geo Group, Inc. led to her son's preventable suicide at the Val Verde Correctional Facility in Del Rio, Texas. Geo Group is one of the world's leading private prison management companies with annual revenue in excess of \$2 billion.

Attorneys Stephanie B. Sherman and Monique Alarcon filed the complaint ([case no. 2:22-cv-00032](#)) in U.S. District Court for the Western District of Texas, Del Rio Division. The lawsuit alleges

negligence and civil rights violations resulted in the death of Keegan Killin, who was in solitary confinement despite numerous documented mental health concerns. According to the allegations, the defendants consciously ignored the high risk for suicide among prison inmates and helped facilitate Keegan Killin's unnecessary death.

The lawsuit seeks punitive damages and names the following as defendants:

- The Geo Group, Inc. of Boca Raton, Florida – The owner and operator of Val Verde Correctional Facility. Designated healthcare and mental healthcare provider at the prison.
- Val Verde County, Texas – Designated and delegated Geo Group to provide healthcare and



Keegan Killin



Baum Hedlund Trial Lawyers



The lack of humanity in this case is appalling.”

Stephanie Sherman, Texas-California Trial Lawyer

mental healthcare at Val Verde Correctional Facility.

- Christopher Martinez, Contracted by Geo Group as the Warden at Val Verde Correctional Facility
- Antonio Cadena, Jr. M.D. – Contracted by Geo Group as Medical Director at Val Verde Correctional Facility
- Jether C. Farino, M.D. – Contracted by Geo Group as Psychiatrist at Val Verde Correctional Facility

- Jessica Beachkofsky, M.D. – Contracted by Geo Group as Psychiatrist at Val Verde Correctional Facility
- Magdalene D. Garza, M.D. – Contracted by Geo Group as Psychiatrist at Val Verde Correctional Facility

Keegan G. Killin was 21 years old when he died alone by hanging himself on March 13, 2021. Killin had been a pretrial detainee at Val Verde Correctional Facility for 15 months without a conviction. He was not a serial criminal nor a violent offender. His mother says Killin had a documented history of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and had previously attempted suicide, yet was placed in solitary confinement without justification, monitoring, or proper treatment.

Attorneys for Guadarrama say that despite Killin’s documented mental health concerns and the abundance of medical studies highlighting the high risk of suicide among inmates in solitary, the defendants allegedly gave or allowed Killin to have:

- Psychotropic drugs known to cause suicide;
- Tools to kill himself, including tie offs, bunk beds, razors, and shoestrings;
- Access to home-made wine.

“Geo Group and the other defendants knew Keegan had a history of PTSD and had previously attempted suicide,” says attorney for the plaintiff, Stephanie Sherman. “They knew he was barely sleeping. They knew he was dealing with serious mental health issues. They knew he had been on and off several medications. And yet they chose to lock him up by himself knowing that he would only be observed just a few seconds every 30 minutes. Think about how little you would have to care about a person to know they are incredibly vulnerable to self-harm and your response is to isolate them and actually give them what they need to take their own life. The lack of humanity in this case is appalling.”

Attorneys for the plaintiff say the defendants violated Keegan Killin’s 14th Amendment rights to due process by acting with "deliberate and conscious indifference" to his health and safety. The complaint also includes negligence allegations against GEO Group, Dr. Cadena, and the psychiatrist defendants.

During his time at Val Verde Correctional Facility, Geo Group psychiatrists put Killin on several different psychiatric medications, including Prozosin, Zoloft, and Trazodone, the complaint

alleges. In October of 2020, Dr. Garza discontinued Killin's psychiatric medications with no plan or bridge of treatment following the sudden discontinuation. For five months prior to his suicide, Killin was not on any psychiatric medications for his mental illnesses until a few days prior to his death and was not receiving any psychotherapy, which is the first line of treatment for PTSD. He was assigned to solitary confinement during this same period.

According to the lawsuit, Geo Group and Warden Christopher Martinez assigned Killin to solitary confinement by request with no reason or justification other than it was Killin's preference to be in solitary. Attorneys say this is not standard practice in a prison and violative of the prison standards. Killin's history of psychiatric medication management while in prison was never reviewed, approved, flagged, or questioned during Killin's transition to solitary confinement, per the complaint.

The lawsuit alleges that Killin was put in solitary confinement with no special monitoring, psychotherapy, suicide preventive measures, or restrictions on what items he could and could not have in his cell.

On March 2, 2021, Killin began taking amitriptyline (a tricyclic antidepressant) after Dr. Beachkofsky prescribed the medication. He had never taken amitriptyline before, which carries a "black box warning" from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regarding its use in adolescents and young adults under 24 years of age because it can increase the risk of suicidal ideation and behaviors. Killin took amitriptyline every night for the 10 days prior to his suicide in solitary.

Allegations against the defendants include:

- Failure to monitor Killin's serious mental illness.
- Failure to recognize and/or diagnose Killin's serious mental illness and symptoms as strong indicators of an immediate danger and risk of death by suicide.
- Failure to act and take measures to prevent Killin from committing suicide. Killin, who was already at high risk for suicide, was put in solitary confinement without psychiatric medications, any special monitoring, psychotherapy, suicide preventive measures, or restrictions on what items he could have in his cell all while under their care.
- Failure to monitor Killin, a young adult, who was given a new antidepressant prescription.
- Failure to recognize Killin's serious mental illness and symptoms as strong indicators of an immediate danger and risk of death by suicide.
- Failure to treat Killin's serious mental illness in line with the current protocols and evidence-based treatments.
- Failure to adequately train employees and health care workers to detect and diagnose serious mental conditions or illnesses.
- Failure to supervise the staff providing mental health care and services to inmates.
- Failure to enforce required behavioral and cell checks for mental health screening.
- Failure to flag dangers present in Killin's cell given his mental condition.

- Failure to provide the least restrictive means available for Keegan in line with the Texas Commission on Jail Standards (TCJS) and suicide studies.
- Failure to enforce rules against contraband and/or alcohol.

Solitary confinement is a high-risk factor for suicide. Studies have shown that suicide is a leading cause of mortality in prisoners, accounting for roughly 30% of all prison deaths. Roughly a 90% of prison suicides result from hanging or self-strangulation. In the U.S., prisoners have 33-fold higher odds of dying by hanging than do suicide decedents in the general population.

Attorneys' say suicide studies dating back to the 1960s were known to the prison officials and medical staff but were deliberately ignored.

[Read more in our blog.](#)

About Attorney Stephanie B. Sherman

Stephanie Sherman is an award-winning Texas trial lawyer and shareholder at Baum Hedlund Aristei & Goldman. With her unique background in both psychology and law, Sherman understands the complexities of trauma and prides herself on being a champion for the nation's most vulnerable. Her ceaseless advocacy in high-stakes personal injury and wrongful death litigation has earned compensation for clients worth hundreds of millions.

About Baum Hedlund Aristei & Goldman

Baum Hedlund Aristei & Goldman is a national law firm that handles high-stakes litigation against major corporations and other entities that cause serious harm. As one of the nation's top plaintiffs' civil trial law firms, Baum Hedlund has won some of the largest personal injury and wrongful death verdicts and settlements in recent history. Law360 has recognized the firm with the California Powerhouse award and the Product Liability Practice Group of the Year. ALM and The National Law Journal twice awarded Baum Hedlund attorneys with the Elite Trial Lawyers Trial Team of the Year award and inducted them into the Verdicts Hall of Fame. Across all practice areas, the firm has won more than \$4 billion in verdicts and settlements.

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