

San Diego County Reaches Historic Settlement with Family of 22-Year-Old Who Died of Dehydration After 6 Days in Jail

County Supervisors Approve Record-Setting \$16 Million Payout and Deputy Training Reforms to Address Ongoing Jail-Death Crisis

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[Civil rights law firm McKenzie Scott PC](#)



announced today that the San Diego County Board of Supervisors has voted to approve a historic settlement to resolve the in-custody wrongful death case of Estate of Hayden Schuck v. County of San Diego, et al. (Case No. 23-cv-00785-DMS-AHG). The settlement terms include a record \$16 million payout as well as mandatory jail-deputy training reforms.

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*San Diego Civil Rights Attorney
Tim Scott*

The settlement compensates the estate and parents of William Hayden Schuck, a 22-year-old son and brother, who died from dehydration and untreated drug withdrawal after being detained at the San Diego Central Jail from March 10, 2022 until March 16, 2022.

The \$16 million damages award represents the single largest wrongful-death settlement by the County in San Diego history. It also appears to be one of the largest in-custody wrongful-death settlements recorded in the United States ever.

“The County had a choice between a record settlement now or a larger jury verdict later” said trial lawyer Tim Scott, attorney for the Schuck family. “Our goal is to make it too expensive for the County to let these needless deaths continue. We are trying to encourage investment in meaningful jail reform instead.”

Scott continued: “The Schuck family's courage in pursuing this case has forced the County to set a new benchmark for accountability. The next preventable death, God forbid, should cost even

more."

"The County was on notice," said attorney Lauren Mellano. "The State Auditor told them their policies were failing, their death rate was unacceptable, and their procedures for responding to medical needs were deficient. This \$16 million settlement reflects years of systemic neglect that cost Hayden his life."

A Preventable Tragedy

Hayden Schuck was an energetic young man with a passion for life; he was dearly loved by his parents, Sabrina and Timothy Schuck, and his two sisters. Despite his struggle with substance abuse, he always brought a smile to the faces of his family and large extended family of cousins, aunts and uncles, whom he adored.

Hayden died alone in a single holding cell after being apparently forgotten for days in a housing area known as the "Back 40"—a temporary cell block that lacked basic amenities like a mattress and hygienic items.

"The wanton disregard for Hayden's life represents a pattern that's harmed countless detainees," attorney Michelle Angeles said. "Change is imperative, and we hope this \$16 million settlement is the catalyst."

"Our son deserves to be heard, so we are committed to being his voice," said Sabrina and Timothy Schuck. "No family should endure what we have endured. We are grateful to Deputy Commander Jesse Johns from the San Diego Sheriff's office who personally reached out to us to discuss our non-monetary demands for training reforms. We trust they are committed to fulfilling our request to establish a protocol that ensures all sworn jail personnel regularly participate in specific training in recognizing the signs of mental illness and substance withdrawal. We hope this settlement contributes to an ongoing community conversation that San Diego's jails must provide basic medical care and human dignity to everyone in their custody."

San Diego County Was on Notice

The settlement comes three years after the California State Auditor issued a critical 2022 report on the San Diego County Sheriff's Department and its jail operations.

The Auditor's report found that from 2006 through 2020, 185 people died in County jails, giving San Diego one of the highest in-custody death rates among counties in the state. The report concluded that the Sheriff's Department "failed to adequately prevent and respond to the deaths of individuals in its custody" and cited systemic issues with departmental policies and practices.

About McKenzie Scott PC

McKenzie Scott PC is a [San Diego-based civil rights and criminal defense law firm](#) founded by Michele A. McKenzie and Timothy A. Scott. The firm specializes in [complex civil rights litigation](#), including police misconduct and jail conditions cases. In 2022, the firm secured an \$85 million jury verdict against San Diego County in K.J.P. v. San Diego, then the largest police in-custody death verdict in American history. For more information, visit www.mckenziescott.com.

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