Residents protest after woman dies in police custody in Harper Woods, Michigan

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On Tuesday, June 9 around 1:00 AM, Harper Woods police arrived at the Parkcrest Inn responding to a report of shots fired. No one was struck or injured. Two arrests were made: Lewis Nichols, 27, and his companion, Priscilla Slater, 38.

By Wednesday around noon Slater was found unresponsive in a holding cell. Attempts to revive her failed and approximately ten minutes later a St. John Hospital doctor pronounced her dead. Her body was transported to the Wayne County Medical Examiner and as of this writing no details have been released on the cause of death. Michigan State Police are investigating the case, according to local news media outlets.

Nichols awaits trial and is facing 20 charges, including assault with intent to murder among others. Since Slater was accompanying Nichols at the time of the alleged shooting, she would have faced a firearm charge. Regardless of Slater's role in whatever transpired at the Parkcrest Inn, she had the right to a fair trial but did not get to see her day in court. She also had the right to medical treatment while in detention.

On Sunday, the Harper Woods Director of Public Safety Vincent Smith told the press that six public safety personnel had been placed on administrative leave. Their connection to Slater's death has not been clarified by the Harper Woods police, but the action is likely a product of protests by Slater's family and friends this week.

On Friday, protesters congregated at the Harper Woods City Hall to demand answers to Slater's death in custody. The city's mayor, Ken Poynter, denounced protesters as "outside agitators" while simultaneously offering condolences. His wife tore up a sign held by one of the protesters.

"What was meant to be something positive and condolences, turned out because of a number of outside agitators who were not even from Harper Woods, they have made a really good peacefully integrated community look extremely bad," Poynter said. The mayor has not clarified who the "outside protesters" were. It is likely that Slater had family and friends outside of Harper Woods who joined Friday's protests.

Protestors gathered again on Sunday outside City Hall on Friday to demand answers. Director of Public Safety for Harper Woods Vincent Smith told the online news outlet ClickOnDetroit that he was still awaiting the results of an autopsy toxicology report from the Wayne County Medical Examiner.

The protest over Slater's death takes place amid growing international demonstrations against police brutality, sparked by the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

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