



PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

JUDGE LIFTS PROTECTIVE SEAL ON EL CENTRO POLICE BODY CAMERAS IN WRONGFUL DEATH OF CHARLES SAMPSON

-- Body camera footage reveals critical details in connection with lawsuit filed by Morris Law Firm in July 2014 against City of El Centro, and Officers James Thompson, Richard Lopez, Corey Gustafson, and Ascencion Felix --

EL CENTRO, CA – [Morris Law Firm, APC](#), a civil rights firm, obtained approval from Magistrate Judge David H. Bartick to remove the protective seal on El Centro Officers' body camera footage, which documents details of Charles ("Charlie") Sampson's death on December 3, 2013. [View the highlights of the video here](#) (viewer discretion advised).

The release of the body camera footage is in connection with the July 2014 lawsuit against the City of El Centro, and Officers James Thompson, Richard Lopez, Corey Gustafson, and Ascencion Felix for negligence, failure to summon medical care, deliberate indifference to Charlie's serious medical needs in violation of the Constitution, and wrongful death on behalf of Charlie's family.

"By releasing this video to the public, the world can see what happened to my husband," said Laverne Sampson, Charlie's wife. "We hope that this video will prevent this from happening to someone else."

"We are grateful to Judge David H. Bartick, who lifted the protective seal on this video, which details the misconduct that led to Charlie's death," said lead counsel [Christopher Morris](#). "Our goal in releasing this video is to join the national conversation regarding the importance of body camera footage. Without this footage, the Sampson family would never have really known what happened to Charlie that night."

Background

On December 3, 2013 around 6:00 p.m., Charlie was pulled over by Officer Thompson for rolling a stop sign. When Officer Thompson found a meth pipe and an old broken down shotgun in Charlie's car,

Charlie was arrested and taken to his own home at around 6:43 p.m. so that the El Centro police could search his home. They apparently suspected he was a drug dealer. Although Charlie struggled with drug addiction, he was not a drug dealer. While the officers were searching Charlie's home, Charlie was left un-handcuffed in the back of the police car. Charlie can be seen on the video putting something into his mouth at 6:50 p.m. The officers can be heard on the video repeatedly threatening Charlie that they will arrest him, his wife, and his son if they find drugs. The toxicologist report revealed he swallowed an unknown quantity of methamphetamine. Evidence shows that Officer Thompson suspected that Charlie swallowed meth in order to hide it from the police.

Within minutes of swallowing the methamphetamine, Charlie's health began to quickly deteriorate. Although it was cold outside, he was profusely sweating and could barely walk or talk. As can be seen in the video, his condition stands in stark contrast to his condition during the initial traffic stop. Family, friends and neighbors watched Charlie quickly deteriorate before their eyes.

Heard in the video footage, Charlie's family and friends pleaded with Officer Thompson and Officer Lopez to call paramedics. The families' pleas were ignored. Even though they suspected drug poisoning, the officers are heard telling the family that Charlie was just "faking it" and "putting on a show" so he would not have to go to jail. Taking matters into their own hands, Charlie's family started calling 911 themselves; however, El Centro PD never acknowledged the call. Charlie's sister-in-law, Denise Campbell, who had worked for the Imperial County's Sheriff Department, then called the front desk of the police department for help. After Denise requested an ambulance, the dispatcher hung up. Evidence shows that at the same time Charlie's family was calling for help, one of the officers on scene, Officer Lopez, called dispatch instructing them that the families' 911 calls were to be disregarded. A recording of this call is also now available to the public.

At 9:20 p.m., an officer was ordered to take a now incoherent Charlie Sampson to jail. Instead, that officer took Charlie to the hospital. At 9:39 p.m. a police cruiser carrying a handcuffed Charlie pulled into the El Centro Regional Medical Center. Charlie was dead on arrival.

Morris Law Firm APC is demanding a jury trial. [Read the operative complaint.](#)

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San Diego-based Morris Law Firm APC specializes in complex civil, criminal and probate litigation.

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