
NEWS RELEASE

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IMMIGRATION DETAINEE SUCCUMBS TO CANCER AT AGE 36 *PUBLIC JUSTICE TO PROCEED WITH MEDICAL NEGLIGENCE LAWSUIT*

Francisco Castaneda, the California man whose penis was amputated in a life-saving measure following egregious medical neglect by state and federal authorities, died at his Los Angeles-area home on Saturday, Feb. 16. He was 36.

Mr. Castaneda drew national attention in October 2007, when he shared his horror story with a House subcommittee, explaining that California state officials and U.S. Immigration officials had repeatedly refused him reasonable and humane medical care, including a biopsy that had been recommended by state, federal and private doctors.

When he finally got the biopsy on his own following his sudden release from an immigrant detention facility in San Pedro, Calif., Mr. Castaneda was diagnosed with invasive squamous cell carcinoma of the penis. Doctors amputated his penis on Feb. 14, 2007, but the cancer had already spread.

At the October hearing, Mr. Castaneda told members of Congress that, although his prognosis was dire, he hoped his situation would give impetus to much-needed reforms in detainee treatment and care.

Public Justice filed a federal lawsuit against the U.S. Government and several federal and state officials on Mr. Castaneda's behalf on Nov. 2, charging that their mishandling of the Salvadoran native's condition "was tantamount to torture."

Mr. Castaneda underwent multiple rounds of chemotherapy before succumbing to cancer last weekend.

"This never should have happened to my brother and should never happen to anyone else," said Yanira Castaneda, who helped care for Mr. Castaneda in the last year of his life. "His death could have been prevented if the federal government had given him proper medical care."

Public Justice cooperating counsel Conal Doyle of Willoughby Doyle in San Francisco, said Mr. Castaneda's suffering – and, now, his family's – was needless.

"This tragedy could have been easily prevented by the exercise of basic human decency," Doyle said.

Meanwhile, the lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles, will proceed.

"It was very important to Mr. Castaneda to expose the federal government's inhumane treatment of immigration detainees – not only because of what he suffered, but to stop others' suffering," said Public Justice Attorney Adele Kimmel. "Public Justice will honor Mr. Castaneda's wish by pressing forward with his lawsuit to help change a system that is severely broken."

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