

August 9, 2007

The Hon. Patrick Lynch
Attorney General
150 South Main Street
Providence, RI 02903

BY FAX AND MAIL

Dear Attorney General Lynch:

Newspaper reports today have described the death on Tuesday of Edmar Alves Araujo, a man with epilepsy, while in the custody of immigration officials. According to those reports, Mr. Araujo's sister claims that after her brother called to say he had been arrested by Woonsocket police after he had been pulled over for a traffic violation, she immediately went to the police station with his epilepsy medication. She allegedly told police that he had seizure problems, but the officers there refused to accept the medicine she had brought for him. Shortly after police transferred him to federal authorities, Mr. Araujo showed "physical signs of distress." He died a short time later after being taken to Rhode Island Hospital.

We have today filed an open records request with the Woonsocket Police Department to obtain copies of its policies that address how the medical needs of individuals in that Department's custody are handled. In light of this tragic incident, I am writing to also urge that you conduct an immediate inventory of other municipal police department policies across the state that address the screening of, and provision of medication to, detainees who may have emergency medical needs. Obviously, we have no first-hand knowledge of what transpired in this particular case, but we believe undertaking this inventory is essential in order to determine if appropriate procedures are in place so as to prevent similar tragedies like this from occurring. If the policies are deficient, we hope you will do all that is necessary to ensure that proper screening protocols are promptly adopted by all police departments in Rhode Island.

Thank you in advance for considering this request. I look forward to hearing back from you about this, and look forward to a favorable response.

Sincerely,

Steven Brown
Executive Director