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Officials: Jeffrey Epstein dies by suicide in jail cell

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Jeffrey Epstein, the well-connected financier accused of orchestrating a sex-trafficking ring, killed himself while awaiting trial in a New York prison, officials said Saturday.

Epstein was found unresponsive in his cell Saturday morning at the Metropolitan Correctional Center, according to a statement from the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

The Fire Department said it received a call at 6:39 a.m. Saturday that Epstein was in cardiac arrest, and he was pronounced dead at New York Presbyterian-Lower Manhattan Hospital.

Epstein, 66, had been denied bail and faced up to 45 years behind bars on federal sex trafficking and conspiracy charges unsealed last month. Prosecutors accused him of sexually abusing dozens of underage girls. He had pleaded not guilty.

His arrest last month launched separate investigations into how authorities handled his case initially when similar charges were first brought against him in Florida more than a decade ago. U.S. Labor Secretary Alexander Acosta resigned last month after coming under fire for overseeing that deal when he was U.S. attorney in Miami.

The Bureau of Prisons confirmed that he had been housed in the jail's Special Housing Unit, a heavily secured part of the facility that separates high-profile inmates from the general population. Until recently, the same unit had been home to the Mexican drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, who is now serving a life sentence at the so-called Supermax prison in

Colorado.

A little over two weeks ago, Epstein was found on the floor of his jail cell with bruises on his neck, according to a person familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity. At the time, it was not clear whether the injuries were self-inflicted or from an assault.

Epstein's death is likely to raise questions about how the Bureau of Prisons ensures the welfare of high-profile inmates. In October, Boston gangster James "Whitey" Bulger was killed in a federal prison in West Virginia where he had just been transferred.

Cameron Lindsay, a former warden who ran three federal lockups, said the death represents "an unfortunate and shocking failure, if proven to be a suicide."

"Unequivocally, he should have been on active suicide watch and therefore under direct and constant supervision," Lindsay said. "When you have an inmate as high profile as Epstein, it's absolutely imperative the warden set the tone with his or her leadership to ensure these kinds of incidents don't happen."

The FBI is investigating Epstein's death, the Bureau of Prisons said.

On Friday, more than 2,000 pages of documents were released related to a since-settled lawsuit against Epstein's ex-girlfriend by Virginia Giuffre, one of Epstein's accusers. The records contain graphic allegations against Epstein, as well as the transcript of a 2016 deposition of Epstein in which he repeatedly refused to answer questions to avoid incriminating himself.

Sigrid McCawley, Giuffre's attorney, said Epstein's suicide less than 24 hours after the documents were unsealed "is no coincidence." McCawley called on federal authorities to continue their investigation, focusing on Epstein associates who she said "participated and facilitated Epstein's horrifying sex trafficking scheme."

"The reckoning of accountability begun by the voices of brave and truthful victims should not end with Jeffrey Epstein's cowardly and shameful suicide," McCawley said in a statement. "The victims await the true justice they have sought and deserve."

Other accusers and their lawyers reacted to the news with frustration that the financier won't have to face them in court.

"We have to live with the scars of his actions for the rest of our lives, while he will never face the consequences of the crimes he committed the pain and trauma he caused so many people," accuser Jennifer Araoz said in a statement.

Brad Edwards, a Florida lawyer for nearly two dozen other accusers, said that "this is not the ending anyone was looking for."

"The victims deserved to see Epstein held accountable, and he owed it to everyone he hurt to accept responsibility for all of the pain he caused," Edwards said in a statement.

Epstein's arrest drew national attention, particularly focusing on a deal that allowed Epstein to plead guilty in 2008 to soliciting a minor for prostitution in Florida and avoid more serious federal charges.

Federal prosecutors in New York reopened the probe after investigative reporting by The Miami

Herald stirred outrage over that plea bargain.

But his lawyers maintained that the new charges brought by federal prosecutors in New York were covered by the deal and were improper. They said he hasn't had any illicit contact with underage girls since serving his 13-month sentence in Florida.

Before his legal troubles, Epstein led a life of extraordinary luxury that drew powerful people into his orbit.

He socialized with princes and presidents and lived on a 100-acre private island in the Caribbean and one of the biggest mansions in New York.

The somewhat reclusive Epstein splashed into the news in 2002 after a New York tabloid reported he had lent his Boeing 727 to ferry former President Bill Clinton and other notables on an AIDS relief mission to Africa.

His friends over the years have included Donald Trump, Britain's Prince Andrew and former Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz.

But Epstein also enjoyed surrounding himself with much younger women, including Russian models who attended his cocktail parties and beautiful women he flew aboard his plane, according to a 2003 Vanity Fair profile.

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