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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Wagner Reese Files Civil Rights Lawsuit against the Allen County Sherriff and Board of Commissioners for the Wrongful Death of 18-year-old Ariona Darling**

FORT WAYNE, Indiana – On June 26, 2023, Indiana law firm Wagner Reese, LLP filed a federal wrongful death civil rights lawsuit against the Allen County Sheriff, David Gladioux; Jail Commander, David Butler; the Allen County Board of Commissioners; and two (2) Jail Officers. The lawsuit also names Quality Correctional Care, LLC, the medical and mental health contractor for the Allen County Jail, and two of its employees. The lawsuit arises out of the death of 18-year-old Ariona Darling who hung herself on June 27, 2021 while on suicide watch at the Jail.

The family’s attorney, Stephen M. Wagner, issues the following statement in connection with the filing of the lawsuit:

*“Kicking the can down the road has consequences. The death of 18-year-old Ariona Darling at the Allen County Jail is the tragic consequence of the Board of Commissioners’ refusal to address chronic overcrowding, understaffing, and antiquated facilities at the Jail. For years, the Board of Commissioners and the Sheriff have known about these horrible conditions and the Jail’s inability to safely house individuals awaiting their criminal trials. Annual Jail inspections and numerous deaths in the Jail over the years provided plenty of notice. It was only a class action lawsuit was filed, and after a federal judge ordered Allen County to make permanent changes in March of 2022, that the planning process for construction of a new jail began in earnest. Even now—almost 3 ½ years after the class action lawsuit was filed—a shovel still has not been put in the ground. Sadly, these proposed changes come too late for Ariona.*

*‘Darling!’ This was the scream nearby inmates in Allen County Jail’s Z Block heard on the afternoon of June 27, 2021. It came from a jail officer as she entered Ariona’s cell. The officer found Ariona unresponsive in her cell, hanging from a bedsheet. This was actually not surprising since Ariona was on suicide watch. Ariona had asked to see a psychiatrist, but the Jail had not yet scheduled her for an appointment. She had also asked for her mental health medications to be adjusted because they were not working, but the Jail’s medical contractor ignored her request. Yet, she was on a suicide watch and was supposed to be checked on every 15 minutes, but due to overcrowding and understaffing at the Jail, officers had not checked on her for over an hour and twenty minutes. This allowed Ariona plenty of time to place a piece of paper over her cell window and make preparations to take her own life. During the last few hours of her life, Ariona could be heard kicking at her cell door, screaming and crying for help. Other inmates heard this, but had no way to notify officers because there are few officer patrols and no call buttons accessible to inmates. Ariona was also supposed to be housed in a cell with a camera so she could be*

*monitored remotely. That did not happen, either, as there are very few cells at the Jail with in-cell cameras. As a result of these conditions which have been known to the Sheriff and Board of Commissioners for many years, Ariona was left alone at her most vulnerable time. Her death was entirely foreseeable and entirely preventable. Until Allen County remedies the unconstitutional and inhumane conditions at the Jail, Ariona won't be the last person to needlessly die at the Jail."*

Ariona is survived by her parents, Michael and Erica Newton. Erica is the Special Administrator of her daughter's Estate and releases the following statement:

*"It has been two years since we lost Ariona, and we still miss her deeply each day. She brought joy into so many people's lives with her infectious smile, her singing and dancing, and even her goofy faces. We are filing this lawsuit so that no other family has to experience the tragedy and pain of having a loved one commit suicide in an overcrowded, understaffed jail that cannot take care of those most at risk like our daughter."*

About Stephen M. Wagner and Wagner Reese:

*Attorney Stephen M. Wagner's biography can be found at <https://www.wagnerreese.com/our-team/stephen-wagner/>. Mr. Wagner has handled numerous civil rights cases throughout his career, holding police and jails accountable for constitutional violations that lead to serious injury or death. Wagner Reese is a personal injury and complex litigation law firm representing clients throughout Indiana and across the country. The Wagner Reese team handles many types of claims, including civil rights violations, class actions, mass torts, product liability, vehicle accident, medical malpractice, and more. For more information about Wagner Reese, visit <https://www.wagnerreese.com/>.*