

Epstein files shed new light on what prison officials were doing the night he died

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Tova Noel, center, is surrounded by fellow guards as she departs a court hearing regarding her actions the evening of Jeffrey Epstein's death in prison, outside a federal court in New York, on November 25, 2019.

Lucas Jackson/Reuters/File



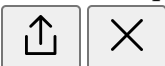
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In the years since disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein was [found dead](#) from what was ruled a suicide in his prison cell on August 10, 2019, conspiracy theories have abounded about whether the convicted sex

offender actually killed himself.

That speculation is likely to get new life now that Tova Noel, one of the prison guards on duty the night of Epstein's death, has been asked to testify before the House Oversight Committee. Her testimony had been scheduled for Thursday but has been postponed due to scheduling issues.

Noel, an Army veteran who started working in the Special Housing Unit of New York's Metropolitan Correctional Center in early July 2019 – the same week Epstein was arrested on federal sex-trafficking charges and incarcerated there – was supposed to be making checks on Epstein every 30 minutes that night along with her colleague, Michael Thomas.

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The DOJ's recent release of millions of documents relating to Epstein has shed new light into his final hours and what prison guards were doing at the time. But they've done little to dispel conspiracy theories about the nature of Epstein's death.

Security cameras positioned near Epstein's cell that night in the Special Housing Unit failed to record, the result of a long-term problem with the facility's cameras [detailed](#) in a 2023 DOJ report. Noel and Thomas were also accused of sleeping on the job at the time of Epstein's death.

The materials released in the files have only raised more questions, including new details about cash deposits Noel made in the months surrounding Epstein's death. The files also show Noel Googled "latest on Epstein in jail" less than an hour before his body was found in his jail cell at around 6:30 a.m.

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The files also include allegations from an inmate who reported that prison officials were shredding documents relating to Epstein in the days after his death.

In 2019, both Noel and Thomas [were charged](#) with conspiracy and falsifying records indicating they had checked on Epstein every 30 minutes as required that night.

Both were fired, but the federal criminal charges were later dropped under the terms of a deferred prosecution agreement that required community service and cooperation with a Justice Department inspector general review of the circumstances surrounding Epstein's death.

CNN has reached out to attorneys for both Noel and Thomas for comment.

According to that inspector general report released by the DOJ in 2023, half of the security cameras in the prison weren't functional. As a result, there was a significant lack of video footage for the FBI and OIG to review in their investigations — a detail that has fueled speculation that Epstein, who was in close contact with many influential people, including royalty, politicians and celebrities, could have been killed by someone wanting to keep him quiet.

It was announced in 2021 that the Metropolitan Correctional Center would be temporarily closed to address issues that long plagued the facility, including lax security and crumbling infrastructure. It remains closed today.

‘No interest’ in killing himself

Epstein was placed on suicide watch after prison officials determined he tried to kill himself on July 23, 2019. But what actually occurred was unclear, as Epstein then accused his cellmate, Nicholas Tartaglione, a former police officer facing murder charges, of trying to kill him. Epstein then recanted that story; in the days after, he told a prison psychologist that Tartaglione had not threatened to harm him and that he had no recollection of the incident, according to [a document labeled “Post Suicide Watch Report.”](#)

A [report from the incident](#) included in the released files said Epstein was found “lying in the fetal position on the floor with a homemade fashioned noose around his neck.”

Epstein stated, “I have no interest in killing myself” on July 24, the day after his reported suicide attempt, according to the [psychologist report](#).



Jeffrey Epstein is seen in this image released by the Department of Justice on December 19, 2025.
US Justice Department/Reuters

He reiterated that during an examination again the next day. “I am too vested in my case to fight it, I have a life and I want to go back to living my life,” he told the psychologist, the report said.

Searching Epstein online

Records indicate that Epstein was found unresponsive in his cell at 6:30 a.m. on August 10 after an apparent suicide by hanging. But less than an hour earlier, Noel had searched on Google, “latest on epstein in jail,” [according to a 66-page forensic examination](#) of the Bureau of Prisons desktop computers of Noel and Thomas. The search was highlighted by investigators. Noel had also searched for furniture and “law enforcement discounts,” according to the examination.

When she was [questioned by the DOJ’s Office of the Inspector General in 2021](#), Noel repeatedly said she did not recall googling Epstein, adding it “wouldn’t be accurate.”

Epstein was also found to have extra clothing and linen in his cell and apparently hung himself with strips of orange cloth. In the sworn statement to the DOJ, Noel, who was working a double shift that day, said she last saw Epstein alive “somewhere around after 10” and that she “never gave out linen” to inmates because that’s done the shift before. Each inmate should have had just one set, she said, exchanging the old for the new whenever there would be a change.

She also told investigators she was not aware that cameras weren’t working while she was on duty the night of Epstein’s death and had no way of monitoring a camera feed while on shift.



The Metropolitan Correctional Center jail in New York, where financier Jeffrey Epstein was found dead while imprisoned, pictured on August 10, 2019.

Jeenah Moon/Reuters/File

Noel said she and other guards counted giving out toilet paper and food or picking up trays as doing a round of checks on inmates, but the strict 30-minute checks they were supposed to do didn't occur.

"I've never worked in the Special Housing Unit and actually done rounds every 30 minutes," she told investigators.

Flagged for cash deposits

One of the documents included in the DOJ's Epstein files says that on November 22, 2019, JP Morgan Chase [provided a Suspicious Activity Report](#) (SAR) to the FBI regarding 12 cash deposits made by Noel occurring between April 2018, more than a year before Epstein's incarceration, and July 2019. The largest amount was \$5,000 on July 30, 2019, [according to bank records](#) that federal investigators subpoenaed from JP Morgan Chase.

She was not asked about the cash deposits during her 2021 interview with DOJ officials, according to the transcript. The bank records also revealed she was leasing a new Land Rover Range Rover valued at more than \$60,000.

Claims of document shredding

On August 19, 2019, less than two weeks after Epstein was found dead in his prison cell, an employee of the Metropolitan Correctional Center [emailed](#) the FBI that an inmate had told them members of the Federal Bureau of Prisons' After Action Team that were investigating Epstein's apparent suicide "were shredding boxes of paperwork" days earlier.

"He stated that he even was told to help them shred paperwork too," the [email said](#). "I believe that this conduct maybe inappropriate for a investigative team to be shredding paperwork related to the investigation and you may want to investigate why BOP employees were destroying records."

During an [interview with investigators weeks later in August 2019](#), the prison employee said he saw the inmate at the prison's rear gate with "approximately three large bags of shredded paper," but the employee did not personally see any shredding take place.

He "thought that there were more shredded documents than usual during this incident," according to the FBI memo of the interview.

In response to the prison employee's initial email about the shredded documents, investigators [commented to each other](#), "Can we take a look at the dumpster ASAP to see if the paper is still in there? Possible they didn't dump it yet."

There's no indication that the dumpster was searched.



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