

CHC Members Demand Answers Following Death of American Citizen James Paul Markowitz in CBP Custody

Mar 3, 2020 | Press Release

DHS has failed to provide further clarity or transparency surrounding the death of a US Citizen in CBP Custody

WASHINGTON— Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) Chairman Joaquin Castro (TX-20) and CHC Immigration Task Force Chairwoman Linda T. Sánchez (CA-38) called on Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Acting Secretary Chad Wolf to answer for the death of an American citizen, James Paul Markowitz, while in Customs and Border Protection (CBP) custody. CBP and DHS have provided little information on the circumstances surrounding his death in the month since the tragedy.

“We remain troubled twenty-eight days after the death of James Paul Markowitz without any further details or relevant information to his case from headquarters at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), or any of its components. CBP will continue to face warranted criticism and questions over its handling of migrants and citizens in custody following the repeated fatalities under this administration's watch. This unacceptable pattern of systematic failures resulting in tragedies has permanently damaged the trust of the public by failing to care for the well-being of those in their custody – in this instance, a United States citizen,” **the Members wrote**. “It is our duty as members of congress to provide oversight, and note transparency, or rather a lack thereof when we see it. We look forward to hearing back from you soon and working together to assure that we put an end to these unnecessary casualties in CBP custody.”

Full text of the letter follows and can be found here (/sites /congressionalhispaniccaucus.house.gov/files /CHC%20Letter%20on%20Death%20of%20US%20Citizen%20in%20DHS%20Custody.pdf).

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf,

We write to you today expressing our concerns with the recent death of 32-year-old United States citizen, James Paul Markowitz, while in Customs and Border Protection

(CBP) custody. It is our understanding that Mr. Markowitz passed away on Tuesday, February 4th after he was accused and arrested by CBP agents as a suspect in an “alien smuggling incident.” Upon his arrest, Mr. Markowitz was taken to the Brackettville, TX station to be processed. According to reports, it was during this time that he began to show signs of distress, and EMT-certified agents gave him first aid and called local emergency medical services as his condition worsened. The EMS arrived 40 minutes after the call and transferred Mr. Markowitz to a nearby hospital, where he was pronounced dead shortly after.

We remain troubled twenty-eight days after the death of James Paul Markowitz without any further details or relevant information to his case from headquarters at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), or any of its components. CBP will continue to face warranted criticism and questions over its handling of migrants and citizens in custody following the repeated fatalities under this administration's watch. This unacceptable pattern of systematic failures resulting in tragedies has permanently damaged the trust of the public by failing to care for the well-being of those in their custody – in this instance, a United States citizen.

Below are questions and concerns we have regarding the death of U.S. citizen, James Paul Markowitz. We ask that DHS answer each of these questions as permitted under federal health regulations by March 15, 2020:

1. What specific signs of distress or preliminary causes of death did Mr. Markowitz exhibit around 6:00 p.m. on February 4th, 2020?
2. Did Mr. Markowitz ask for medical attention before CBP agents deemed it necessary to perform first-aid?
3. What help did Mr. Markowitz receive during the 40 minutes it took for EMT to arrive to the Brackettville Station?
4. How many hours did it take for Mr. Markowitz to be taken to the hospital?
5. Were family members contacted as soon as signs of serious distress were exhibited by Mr. Markowitz?

It is our duty as members of congress to provide oversight, and note transparency, or rather a lack thereof when we see it. We look forward to hearing back from you soon and working together to assure that we put an end to these unnecessary casualties in CBP custody.

Sincerely,

#

The Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), founded in December 1976, is organized as a Congressional Member organization, governed under the Rules of the U.S. House of Representatives. The CHC is dedicated to voicing and advancing, through the legislative process, issues affecting Hispanics in the United States, Puerto Rico and U.S. Territories.