



Charleston County Coroner's Office News Release

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Coroner to Hold Inquest on Aug. 10 for Fatal Dog Mauling of East Cooper 2-year-old

[Charleston County Coroner Rae H. Wooten](#) will hold an inquest into the case of Ja'Marr Tiller, a 2-year-old boy who died after sustaining multiple bites from two dogs in his East Cooper backyard on May 27, 2012.

The inquest will begin at 9 a.m. on Friday, Aug. 10, in the first floor Courtroom B125 in the Lonnie Hamilton, III Public Services Building located at 4045 Bridge View Drive in North Charleston.

The purpose of the inquest is to air the facts and obtain testimony so a jury can gather information, deliberate, and deliver a finding.

"The reason I have decided to do an inquest into Tiller's death is because I have not yet ruled on the manner of death," Wooten said. "An inquest is a powerful tool for me to gather facts, and at the end of the day, the jury is charged with getting back to me a decision on the manner of death."

In South Carolina, there are five manners of death: natural, accidental, suicide, homicide and undetermined.

"We know the cause of death, but are interested in the jurors' ruling regarding manner of death in this very complicated case," Wooten said. "Tiller's death was not natural or a suicide, but is it appropriate to say it's an accident or to charge someone with neglect? The jury's finding won't bind the solicitor in any way, but it's very compelling."

Wooten said an inquest is a judicial proceeding where she pulls jurors from the normal jury pool, seeking six with one alternate, instead of the usual 12 with one alternate. The coroner will subpoena witnesses for their testimony, and she will act as the judge.

"The biggest difference with an inquest is that the jurors get to ask questions, and attorneys can't participate except to the extent that the coroner allows," Wooten said.

"Jurors have been summoned and witnesses will be subpoenaed. Because the Charleston County Sheriff's Office is the investigating agency, some of their officers will be subpoenaed to testify," Wooten said.

Wooten expects that the inquest on Tiller's case will last all day.

The last inquest done by Wooten's office was held December 2008 and lasted until 10 p.m. It was for a case regarding a 2007 plane crash that was initially thought to be an accident but was ultimately ruled undetermined.

SIDEBAR

Coroner Rae Wooten was born, raised and educated in Columbia, South Carolina before moving to the Charleston area in 1973. She graduated from the University of South Carolina with a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing, and subsequently worked as an RN in various settings before joining the Charleston County Coroner's Office in April 1995. She became Chief Deputy Coroner in July 1996 and continued in that position until September 1, 2006 when she was appointed by the governor to complete the term of the previous coroner upon her resignation. She was subsequently elected to her first four-year term in 2008 and is a candidate for re-election in November 2012.

Charleston County Coroner's Office

- The Charleston County Coroner's Office conducts independent investigations of deaths in Charleston County, serving as a representative of the decedents and survivors. The investigation's purpose is to determine the manner of death and ensure that the circumstances surrounding it are thoroughly understood.

- **Functions:**
 - Performs independent investigations into traumatic deaths, deaths that occur outside of hospitals and deaths that occur suddenly or unexpectedly
 - Notifies families when unexpected deaths occur, such as in traffic fatalities or homicides
 - Makes positive identification of individuals who have died
 - Conducts inquests
 - Creates reports that relate to deaths investigated by the Office
 - Issues burial transit permits for individuals who have died outside of a hospital
 - Provides autopsy and Coroner's reports to agencies and next of kin
 - Makes the final determination as to the manner of death
 - Releases personal effects to the next of kin
 - Acts as the central depository for all records relative to a death, including the Medical Examiner's Report, police investigative reports and any other investigative agencies' reports
 - Maintains the County Coroner's Book of Inquisitions with records dating back to 1878
 - Issues cremation permits
 - Offers prevention programs for schools. Topics include drinking and driving, weapons awareness and alcohol and drug abuse.

- **The office does not:**
 - Perform autopsies
 - Issue death certificates
 - Provide burial services

- **For more information**, visit <http://charlestoncounty.org/elected/coroner.htm>

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