

MAN CHARGED IN SON'S DEATH KILLS SELF

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The Brentwood man who Suffolk police said shook his son to death last year took his own life in the county jail, authorities said yesterday, the second apparent suicide at the jail in a month.

Julio Rivera, 26, was found dangling by a bed sheet at the correctional facility in Riverhead at 11:53 p.m. Monday, and attempts to resuscitate him were unsuccessful, said Alan Otto, chief of staff of Suffolk's Sheriff's Department.

Rivera was taken to Peconic Bay Medical Center, where he was pronounced dead at 12:50 a.m.

Rivera faced a second-degree murder charge in the death of his 5-month-old son, Eric, and was scheduled for trial this spring. Suffolk prosecutors said Rivera had, on several occasions, blown PCP-laced marijuana into the 5-month-old child's mouth, and that Rivera ultimately shook the child to death last March.

Eric's mother, Cynthia Morales, 25, also of Brentwood, has pleaded guilty to second-degree manslaughter for doing nothing as Rivera abused the boy, police said. She faces a maximum of 5 to 15 years in prison.

The apparent suicide, which is being investigated by jail authorities and the Forensic Medical Unit of the state Commission of Correction, came as a surprise to Rivera's attorney, who said Rivera had vigorously maintained his innocence and had become increasingly upset over the boy's death, for which he blamed Morales.

"It certainly was a shock to me when I heard about it this morning," said Michael Brown, of Central Islip.

But Brown added that Rivera was despondent, and the fact that his son's mother agreed to testify against him may have aggravated his despair.

"He was very distraught," Brown said. "The family has already lost a child and now they lost another. It's a tremendous tragedy for the family."

Rivera's death follows the apparent suicide of Ymbert Santos, 32, of Amityville, who was found barely breathing in his cell early on Feb. 21.

He was pronounced dead at Peconic Bay Medical Center.

The Commission of Correction officials said the jail has been the site of nine suicides since 1996, a figure that an expert said is low relative to the population, which is about 1,500 inmates each day. The expert also said that two suicides in a month should spark concern.

“Any suicide needs to be looked into seriously,” said Daniel W. Phillips III, a professor of sociology and criminal justice at Lindsey Wilson College in Columbia, Ky.

“When you start having two back-to-back, there can be some kind of problem, like copy-catting. It would alert me if I ran the facility,” Phillips said.

Suffolk County Sheriff Vincent DeMarco, whose department oversees the jail, could not be reached for comment.

Staff writers Alfonso Castillo and Christine Armario contributed to this story.