

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

COUNTY OF CHARLESTON

BRANDON STURGILL, individually and as
Personal Representative of THE ESTATE OF
MARY EMMA BRUCATO,

Plaintiff,

vs.

CHARLESTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S
OFFICE, VITALCORE HEALTH
STRATEGIES, LLC, HARBANS DEOL,
MD, JOHN DOE, AND JOHN DOE
CORPORATION,

Defendants.

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS
FOR THE NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

Civil Action No. 2026-CP-10-_____

SUMMONS

(Jury Trial Demanded)

TO THE DEFENDANTS ABOVE-NAMED:

YOU ARE HEREBY SUMMONED AND REQUIRED to answer the Complaint in this action, a copy of which is herewith served upon you, and to serve a copy of your Answer on the subscribers at their office located at 3 Morris Street, Suite A (29403), Post Office Box 21624, Charleston, South Carolina, 29413, within thirty (30) days of the service, exclusive of the day of such service; and if you fail to answer the Complaint within this time, Plaintiff will move for entry of default judgment and apply to the Court for the relief sought therein.

(Signature Page to Follow)

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ATTORNEYS FOR PLAINTIFF

May 19, 2026
Charleston, South Carolina

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

COUNTY OF CHARLESTON

BRANDON STURGILL, individually and as
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MARY EMMA BRUCATO,

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COMPLAINT

(Jury Trial Demanded)

The Plaintiff, Brandon Sturgill, individually and as Personal Representative of The Estate of Mary Emma Brucato, brings this action against the above-named Defendants and alleges and says as follows:

PARTIES, JURISDICTION, AND VENUE

1. Plaintiff Brandon Sturgill is a citizen and resident of Stafford County, Virginia. Plaintiff Brandon Sturgill is the duly appointed representative of The Estate of Mary Emma Brucato, having been appointed by the Probate Court for Berkeley County, South Carolina on August 29, 2025.

2. Prior to her untimely death, Mary Emma Brucato was a citizen and resident of Berkeley County, South Carolina.

3. Defendant Charleston County Sheriff's Office ("CCSO") is a governmental agency and/or political subdivision of the State of South Carolina, existing under the laws of the State of South Carolina and has facilities located in Charleston County, South Carolina.

4. At all times relevant hereto, Defendant CCSO owned and/or operated the Sheriff Al Cannon Detention Center (“SACDC”) located in Charleston County, South Carolina and acted and carried on its business by and through its agents, servants, and/or employees. Further, at all times relevant hereto, the agents, servants, and/or employees of CCSO were operating within the course and scope of their officially assigned and/or compensated duties.

5. Defendant VitalCore Health Strategies, LLC (“VitalCore”) is a foreign corporation, incorporated in the State of Kansas. VitalCore is a limited liability company with its principal office located in Topeka, Kansas.

6. VitalCore is a private medical provider for SACDC which, at all times relevant hereto, acted by and through its agents, servants, and/or employees, who were acting within the course and scope of their employment, thereby making VitalCore vicariously responsible for their negligent acts and omissions.

7. Harbans Deol, MD (“Deol”) is a medical doctor and the Chief Medical Officer for Defendant VitalCore. Upon information and belief, Defendant Deol is not licensed to practice in the State of South Carolina. Further, SACDC lacks a Medical Director, and Defendant Deol has assumed this role.

8. Plaintiff has made diligent and reasonable efforts to identify the individuals who were involved and negligent in the care, communications, acts and omissions at issue. However, the name of the responsible physician(s) and others who may be involved in the care, or lack thereof, of Ms. Brucato are not identified in the available medical records. In the event discovery reveals the name of the responsible physician or that Plaintiff has not correctly identified the individuals involved in the care, communications, acts and omissions at issue, Defendant John Doe (“Doe”) is presented as a placeholder for the correct persons to be later substituted.

9. Plaintiff has made diligent and reasonable efforts to correctly identify the legal entity(ies) that employed, supervised, and/or managed the individuals complained about herein at the time of the acts and omissions at issue. However, the name of the responsible entity(ies) are not identified in the available medical records. In the event discovery reveals that Plaintiff has not correctly identified the legal entity(ies) that employed, supervised, and/or managed the individuals complained of herein at the time of the acts and omissions at issue, Defendant Doe Corporation (“Doe Corp.”) is presented as a placeholder for the correct legal entity to be later substituted.

10. The claims asserted herein against Defendant CCSO are filed pursuant to the South Carolina Tort Claims Act, S.C. Code Ann. § 15-78-10.

11. With respect to the claims asserted herein against Defendants VitalCore, Deol, Doe, and Doe Corp., Plaintiff has complied with the pre-suit procedural requirements provided for by the South Carolina Medical Malpractice Act, including those provided for in S.C. Code Ann. §§ 15-79-120, 15-70-100, and 15-36-100. Plaintiff previously filed a Notice of Intent to File Suit in a Medical Malpractice Case, Case # 2026-NI-10-00021, against those defendants to whom the Act is applicable. Additionally, in order to comply with all statutory requirements, Plaintiff is attaching and incorporating by reference the affidavit of medical expert Edward C. O’Bryan, III, MD as *Exhibit 1*.

12. This Court has personal jurisdiction over the parties and subject matter jurisdiction over the claims set forth herein.

13. Venue is proper in Charleston County in accordance with S.C. Code Ann. § 15-7-30 because the most substantial acts and omissions giving rise to this action occurred within Charleston County, South Carolina.

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

14. All acts and occurrences which give rise to the Plaintiff's causes of action described herein occurred while Ms. Brucato was in the care, custody and control of the Defendants.

15. Upon information and belief, on August 8, 2025, Ms. Brucato was arrested for drug possession, taken into custody, treated at the Centre Pointe Emergency Room for pain in her forearm due to intravenous drug use, then brought to SACDC and detained.

16. Plaintiff is informed and believes that individuals who have been charged with a crime and taken into custody are presumed innocent and possess the right to have access to and receive fair and reasonable care and treatment, including medical treatment.

17. At all times relevant to this action, Defendant CCSO was obligated to ensure that the inmate population at SACDC was properly supervised and monitored and had access to and received reasonable and adequate medical care.

18. At all times relevant to this action, Defendants VitalCore, Deol, Doe, and Doe Corp. were contractually obligated to provide comprehensive nursing care, medical services, mental health treatment, and medication management to the inmate population at SACDC and had a duty to provide care consistent with applicable standards of medical and psychiatric care.

19. Upon arrival at SACDC, Ms. Brucato completed a drug assessment, mental health screening, and medical assessments. Upon information and belief, Ms. Brucato was placed on detox/withdrawal monitoring and prescriptions were ordered; however, VitalCore failed to properly provide detox/withdrawal monitoring to Ms. Brucato or administer the detox/withdrawal prescriptions.

20. On August 9, 2025, around 8:00 a.m., Ms. Brucato is seen on video vomiting into a garbage can. Deputies escort her to an isolation cell.

21. At around 8:25 p.m. that night, Ms. Brucato walks out of her cell wrapped in a blanket and walks back into her cell. A deputy walks over and shuts her cell door. Despite her obvious need for medical attention, Ms. Brucato was never assessed or checked on by CCSO deputies or by VitalCore's medical staff or healthcare providers.

22. On August 10, 2025, around 6:00 p.m., a deputy observes feces on the floor and smears on the wall of Ms. Brucato's cell. The deputy does not enter and VitalCore medical personnel never checked on, monitored, or assessed Ms. Brucato's condition.

23. At around 10:11 p.m. that night, VitalCore medical staff is alerted to concerns regarding Ms. Brucato. A CCSO deputy and VitalCore medical staff respond but roll a medical cart directly past Ms. Brucato's cell.

24. On August 11, 2025, at 9:55 a.m., CCSO deputies in SACDC alerted VitalCore medical staff of concerns regarding Ms. Brucato and ask them to check on her.

25. Despite this alert, Ms. Brucato was never assessed or checked on by VitalCore's medical staff or healthcare providers.

26. Upon information and belief, VitalCore recklessly failed to provide care to Ms. Brucato, representing a complete abandonment of basic medical monitoring.

27. Despite knowledge of Ms. Brucato's need for medical care – her cries for help were heard throughout the jail – the Defendants willfully failed to administer any care or monitoring, constituting a deliberate indifference to her obvious medical needs and directly contributing to her otherwise preventable death.

28. During the entirety of Ms. Brucato's incarceration, the Defendants systematically failed to monitor Ms. Brucato's physical health despite their awareness of her compromised state and despite their duty to provide supervision and care to detainees.

29. At 3:10 p.m. on August 11, 2025, after two and a half days of medical neglect, Ms. Brucato was discovered in her cell. At this time, a foul smell had filled the jail and Ms. Brucato's body was found stiff and cold, indicating she had been deceased for some time before discovery – further demonstrating the Defendants' failure to provide care, monitoring or regular wellness checks.

30. The Charleston County Coroner officially documented "MEDICAL NEGLECT" as the injury causing her death and concluded that the manner of death was "HOMICIDE." These findings establish a direct causal link between the Defendants' deliberate indifference to Ms. Brucato's medical needs and her painful preventable death while in custody.

FOR A FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION
(Negligence/Gross Negligence – Survival as to Defendant CCSO)

31. Plaintiff hereby incorporates the preceding paragraphs by reference as if set forth herein verbatim.

32. Defendant CCSO owes a duty of care to the inmate population of SACDC to ensure that detainees were properly supervised and monitored and had access to and received reasonable and adequate medical care while in their care, custody, and control.

33. At all times relevant hereto, Defendant CCSO owed this duty to Ms. Brucato while she was in the care, custody, and control of Defendant CCSO as an inmate at SACDC.

34. Defendant directly and/or vicariously through its agents, servants, or employees breached this duty of care to Ms. Brucato and in doing so committed the following negligent, grossly negligent, intentional and/or reckless acts and omissions:

- a. In failing to secure proper care for Ms. Brucato when the Defendant knew or should have known Ms. Brucato was in open and obvious distress;
- b. In failing to provide Ms. Brucato with reasonable, necessary, and appropriate supervision, care, and access to medical treatment;

- c. In failing to monitor Ms. Brucato while she was detained, and to take the proper steps to provide assistance to her when they knew or should have known that she was unable to care for herself;
- d. In failing to provide Ms. Brucato with the care, treatment, supervision, and medication she needed in light of her health conditions;
- e. In failing to properly monitor Ms. Brucato while she was in Defendant's care, custody and control;
- f. In failing to take proper steps to provide assistance to Ms. Brucato when it knew or should have known that VitalCore was not providing appropriate medical attention to her;
- g. In failing to ensure that Ms. Brucato had access to medical care;
- h. In failing to seek emergency medical attention for Ms. Brucato when it knew she was suffering from an open, obvious, and serious medical need;
- i. In failing to timely refer or transport Ms. Brucato to a specialist and/or hospital;
- j. In failing to follow the mandates of Minimum Standards for Local Detention Centers in South Carolina;
- k. In contracting with VitalCore when Defendant CCSO knew or should have known that it was not providing reasonable and adequate medical services to its detainees, including Ms. Brucato;
- l. In failing to terminate its contract with VitalCore when it knew or should have known that VitalCore was not providing reasonable and adequate medical services to its detainees, including Ms. Brucato;
- m. In failing to properly train and/or supervise its employees, agents, and/or staff, so as to ensure that detainees, including Ms. Brucato, are provided with proper care and attention while detained;
- n. In failing to implement the proper policies and/or procedures in place regarding the administration of proper supervision;
- o. In failing to comply with national, state, and local standards and guidelines, including the standards set forth by the National Commission on Correctional Health Care, with regard to the provision of medical care in detention facilities;
- p. In failing to train its employees, agents, and/or staff to recognize the medical needs of detainees, including Ms. Brucato;

- q. In abandoning Ms. Brucato when she was in desperate need of attention and medical care;
- r. In failing to have proper communication by and between the officers at SACDC and the medical personnel contracted to provide medical assistance and care to the detainees; and
- s. In such other acts and omissions as the evidence of this case may show.

35. That as a direct and proximate result of the negligent, grossly negligent, intentional and/or reckless acts and omissions of Defendant CCSO as set out herein, Ms. Brucato was made to suffer significant pain and suffering, mental anguish, psychological trauma, emotional distress, and ultimately death.

36. That because of the acts and omissions of Defendant CCSO as set out herein, which resulted both proximately and directly in the damages set out above, the Plaintiff is entitled to an award of actual damages against the Defendant as well as an exemplary amount of punitive damages, jointly and severally, in an amount to be determined by a jury at the trial of this action.

FOR A SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION
(Wrongful Death as to Defendant CCSO)

37. Plaintiff hereby incorporates the preceding paragraphs by reference as if set forth herein verbatim.

38. This action is brought for the wrongful death of Mary Brucato pursuant to the provisions of S.C. Code Ann. § 15-51-10 *et seq.* and is brought for any statutory heirs of Mary Brucato who died August 11, 2025.

39. The death of Ms. Brucato was caused and occasioned by the negligent, grossly negligent, intentional, and/or reckless acts and omissions on behalf of Defendant CCSO as set forth above.

40. At the time of her death, Ms. Brucato was just 23 years old. By reason of her untimely death, her heirs have been deprived of all the benefits of her society and companionship and have been caused great mental shock and suffering by reason of her death. They have and will forever be caused grief and sorrow by the loss of Ms. Brucato's love, society, and companionship. They have been deprived of her future experiences and judgments. They have incurred expenses for her funeral and final expenses and, as a result of the foregoing, they have sustained the following damages:

- a. Mental shock and suffering;
- b. Wounded feelings;
- c. Greif and sorrow;
- d. Loss of support;
- e. Loss of companionship; and
- f. Deprivation of the use and comfort of Ms. Brucato's society and loss of her experience knowledge and judgment.

41. As a further result, because of the acts and omissions of Defendant CCSO as set out herein, which resulted both proximately and directly in the death of Ms. Brucato, the Plaintiff is entitled to an award of actual damages against the Defendants as well as an exemplary amount of punitive damages, jointly and severally, in an amount to be determined by a jury at the trial of this action.

FOR A THIRD CAUSE OF ACTION

(Medical Negligence - Survival as to Defendant VitalCore, Deol, Doe, and Doe Corp.)

42. Plaintiff hereby incorporates the preceding paragraphs by reference as if set forth herein verbatim.

43. Defendants VitalCore, Deol, Doe, and Doe Corp. owe a duty of care to patients in their care, custody, and control to use reasonable care in their treatment and to not deviate from the prevailing and acceptable standards of routine, medical, and non-medical duties.

44. At all times relevant hereto, Defendants owed this duty to Ms. Brucato while she was in their care, custody, and control while incarcerated at SACDC.

45. Defendants directly and/or vicariously through their agents, servants, or employees failed to provide the requisite and adequate care to Ms. Brucato and in doing so committed the following negligent, grossly negligent, intentional and/or reckless acts and omissions, which constitute a failure to comply with the appropriate standard of care:

- a. In failing to conduct a thorough health assessment of Ms. Brucato;
- b. In failing to give due wight and consideration for Ms. Brucato's withdrawal and detox needs immediately upon her arrival;
- c. In failing to obtain Ms. Brucato's vital signs during her period of incarceration;
- d. In failing to exercise reasonable or slight care to prevent and/or treat Ms. Brucato's detox and withdrawal;
- e. In failing to exercise reasonable or slight care in the administration and management of Ms. Brucato's necessary detox/withdrawal medications;
- f. In failing to recognize Ms. Brucato's decision-making incompetence due to intoxication, detox, and withdrawal;
- g. In failing to exercise reasonable or slight care to timely transfer Ms. Brucato to an emergency department or outside medical facility for advanced medical care in light of her deteriorating medical condition;
- h. In failing to exercise reasonable or slight care to intervene whatsoever to provide any reasonable treatment for Ms. Brucato's declining health; and
- i. In such other acts and omissions as the evidence of this case may show.

46. The negligent, grossly negligent, intentional, and/or reckless deviations from the standard of care as set forth above were the proximate cause of Plaintiff's damages.

47. That as a direct and proximate result of the negligent, grossly negligent, intentional, and/or reckless acts and omissions of Defendants as set out herein, Ms. Brucato was made to suffer significant pain and suffering, mental anguish, psychological trauma, emotional distress, and ultimately death.

48. That because of the acts and omissions of Defendants as set out herein, which resulted both proximately and directly in the damages set out above, the Plaintiff is entitled to an award of actual damages against the Defendants as well as an exemplary amount of punitive damages, jointly and severally, in an amount to be determined by a jury at the trial of this action.

FOR A FOURTH CAUSE OF ACTION
(Wrongful Death as to Defendants VitalCore, Deol, Doe, and Doe Corp.)

49. Plaintiff hereby incorporates the preceding paragraphs as if set forth fully herein verbatim.

50. This action is brought for the wrongful death of Mary Brucato pursuant to the provisions of S.C. Code Ann. § 15-51-10 *et seq.* and is brought for any statutory heirs of Mary Brucato who died August 11, 2025.

51. The death of Ms. Brucato was caused and occasioned by the negligent, grossly negligent, intentional, and/or reckless acts and omissions on behalf of Defendants VitalCore, Deol, Doe, and Doe Corp. as set forth above.

52. At the time of her death, Ms. Brucato was just 23 years old. By reason of her untimely death, her heirs have been deprived of all the benefits of her society and companionship and have been caused great mental shock and suffering by reason of her death. They have and will forever be caused grief and sorrow by the loss of Ms. Brucato's love, society, and companionship. They have been deprived of her future experiences and judgments. They have incurred expenses

for her funeral and final expenses and, as a result of the foregoing, they have sustained the following damages:

- a. Mental shock and suffering;
- b. Wounded feelings;
- c. Greif and sorrow;
- d. Loss of support;
- e. Loss of companionship; and
- f. Deprivation of the use and comfort of Ms. Brucato's society and loss of her experience knowledge and judgment.

53. As a further result, because of the acts and omissions of Defendants VitalCore, Deol, Doe, and Doe Corp. as set out herein, which resulted both proximately and directly in the death of Ms. Brucato, the Plaintiff is entitled to an award of actual damages against the Defendants as well as an exemplary amount of punitive damages, jointly and severally, in an amount to be determined by a jury at the trial of this action.

WHEREFORE, the Plaintiff prays for judgment against the Defendants, jointly and severally, for a reasonable amount of actual damages, for an exemplary amount of punitive damages, for the costs and disbursements of this action, and for such other and further relief as this Court may deem just and proper.

(Signature Page to Follow)

Respectfully submitted,

McLEOD LAW GROUP, LLC

s/ H. Cooper Wilson, III

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ATTORNEYS FOR PLAINTIFF

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Charleston, South Carolina

Exhibit 1

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

COUNTY OF CHARLESTON

BRANDON STURGILL, individually and as
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Civil Action No. 2026-NI-10 ____

**AFFIDAVIT OF
EDWARD O'BRYAN, MD**

I, Edward O'Bryan, MD, being duly sworn, hereby depose and/or affirm the following:

1. My name is Edward O'Bryan. I am over the age of eighteen, of sound mind and otherwise competent to give this affidavit, which is based upon my background, education, training, and experience. I also base my opinions on my own personal view of the medical records of Mary Emma Brucato, deceased.

2. I am a medical doctor, licensed in the State of South Carolina, and board certified in internal medicine. My further qualifications and background are set forth in the attached CV (Exhibit "A"), which I incorporate by reference.

3. I have actual professional knowledge and experience in my area of expertise, internal medicine, which includes the practices of a hospitalist.

4. I am familiar with the standards of care applicable to the Charleston County Detention Center (CCDC) and VitalCore Health Strategies, LLC (VitalCore), during the time of Ms. Brucato's incarceration.

5. The evidence made available to me, for my review, prior to making this affidavit, include the records for Mary Brucato from VitalCore Health Strategies, LLC, the Charleston County Coroner's Office, and Trident Medical Center (Centre Point). Additionally, I anticipate the opportunity to review additional medical records and documents pertaining to this matter and reserve the right to supplement my opinion.

6. Based on the materials I have reviewed, it is my opinion that there was a deviation in the standard of care in that Defendant VitalCore and the unnamed defendants did not properly evaluate, assess, and/or respond to Ms. Brucato's conditions during her incarceration from August 8, 2025, through August 11, 2025.

7. In particular, it is my opinion that VitalCore and any unnamed defendant with responsibility for Ms. Brucato's care and treatment while at CCDC deviated from the standard of care in the following particulars:

- i. In failing to conduct a thorough health assessment of Ms. Brucato;
- ii. In failing to give due weight and consideration for Ms. Brucato's withdrawal and detox needs immediately upon her arrival;
- iii. In failing to obtain Ms. Brucato's vital signs during her period of incarceration;
- iv. In failing to conduct regular wellness checks;
- v. In failing to exercise reasonable or slight care to prevent and/or treat Ms. Brucato's detox and withdrawal;
- vi. In failing to exercise reasonable or slight care to administer Ms. Brucato's necessary detox/withdrawal medications;
- vii. In failing to recognize Ms. Brucato's decision-making incompetence due to intoxication, detox, and withdrawal;

viii. In failing to exercise reasonable or slight care to timely transfer Ms. Brucato to an emergency department or outside medical facility for advanced medical care in light of her deteriorating medical condition;

ix. In failing to exercise reasonable or slight care to intervene whatsoever to provide any reasonable treatment for Ms. Brucato's declining health.

8. In my opinion, proper care and treatment would have markedly reduced the severity of Ms. Brucato's condition. But for said deviations, to a reasonable degree of medical certainty, Ms. Brucato would not have died on August 11, 2025.

9. The information that I reviewed to form my opinions in this case is of a type typically and reasonably relied upon by experts in my field in forming opinions.

10. This Affidavit is not necessarily a summary of all opinions that I may hold in this matter or a listing of every material violation of the standard of care. I reserve the right to modify, change, or supplement these opinions in the future.



Edward O Bryan, MD, MBA, CPE

SWORN to before me this

3rd day of March, 2026

 Michael O'Neal

Notary Public for the State of South Carolina

My Commission Expires: 10-24-33