N.J. jail inmate died after being hit in the head during fight, his family says

An Essex County inmate died on Feb. 22 while he was in custody at a privately-run jail annex, according to the Essex County Prosecutor's Office, which is investigating the death. The inmate was Garrison Bryant, 33, who pleaded guilty in January to a charge of aggravated assault on a law enforcement officer, the Prosecutor's Office said. He was to be sentenced later this month. Bryant's death is the third time since September that an inmate has died or been seriously injured while in county custody. Jayshawn Boyd, 22, was beaten with a microwave by other inmates in September, leaving him in a coma. And Dan Gelin, a 27-year-old pretrial detainee, died at the jail in December. A union official said he was stabbed and returned to his cell rather than to a hospital, and the Attorney General in investigating. Neither the Prosecutor's Office nor Essex County officials had previously announced Bryant's death, but they confirmed it to NJ Advance Media. Brooke Barnett, a Newark attorney hired by Bryant's family after he died, said Bryant was in a fight on or about Feb. 20, during which he was struck in the head from behind by a broomstick. He spoke to his mother by phone, and he complained of head pain and jumbled his words, the attorney said. Bryant also sought medical attention from the facility's staff and received medication for his head pain, Barnett said. Inmates later found Bryant unconscious, and he was taken by ambulance to University Hospital, where he was pronounced dead, she said. Barnett said the family is contemplating a lawsuit. The facility provides care to Essex County's lower-level inmates and focuses on substance abuse rehabilitation and other things to help reduce recidivism, said Essex County Chief of Staff Phil Alagia. The facility does not use Essex County corrections officers, but county jail officials conduct walk-throughs of the facility, Alagia said. On Thursday, Delaney Hall housed about 250 Essex County inmates. The recent incidents prompted a review of the operating procedures at the Essex County jail, including security, staffing and employee responsibilities. The review is being led by retired Newark Public Safety Director Anthony Ambrose. Reached Thursday, he said he could not comment on Bryant's death and would not be reviewing it until after the Prosecutor's Office has concluded its investigation. He estimated his report on the jail will complete in about three months.