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**Monday, July 28, 2025** **Page 1** **Athens, Tennessee**

# Lawsuit Alleges Woman Died from Neglect While Detoxing in McMinn County Jail



A federal lawsuit filed last week claims a Meigs County woman died after being neglected while suffering fentanyl withdrawals in the McMinn County Jail.

Debra Annette McHone, 59, was arrested on July 18, 2024, for alleged public intoxication after being discharged twice from Starr Regional Medical Center in Athens. She died the following day while being transported from the jail to a hospital, the lawsuit states. The suit, filed by Kris Frye on behalf of McHone's estate, names over 30 defendants including McMinn County, Sheriff Joe Guy, Starr Regional Medical Center, and Direct Primary Care Associates — the jail's contracted medical provider. It alleges that jail staff failed to render adequate medical care despite knowing McHone had just left the hospital and was showing signs of severe withdrawal.

According to the lawsuit, McHone was placed in a medical observation cell but was not seen by medical staff until nearly 12 hours later, after repeatedly crying out in pain. She was reportedly trembling, defecating on herself, and begging for help as her condition deteriorated. After roughly 32 hours in custody, a non-emergency transport was requested to take her to the hospital. She died en route. The lawsuit also highlights a county policy implemented in 2020 to minimize jail healthcare costs by contracting with a low-cost provider. Since that time, at least 13 in-custody deaths have occurred, the lawsuit says — McHone's being the ninth. Sheriff Joe Guy stated that McHone was provided appropriate care and was eventually transported back to the hospital on a medical furlough. He noted staff had asked her daughter to pick her up prior to the transport, but the request was declined.

Attorneys representing McMinn County and Starr Regional Medical Center said the parties plan to defend themselves vigorously. Meanwhile, attorney Tyler Weiss, representing McHone's estate, says more lawsuits over jail deaths are pending and points to a broader pattern of neglect in the facility. The lawsuit seeks an unspecified amount of damages, attorney fees, and a jury trial.

Story/Photo Source: [WTVN NewsChannel 9](#)

**Monday - Closed**

- Tue-Madisonville: Wil Sav -10:30 - 2
- Wed - Private Catering
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Monday, July 28, 2025

Morning Fax®...Today's News This Morning Page 2

Athens, Tennessee

## No Injuries Reported in Two-Vehicle Crash Near Athens



A 2017 Honda Pilot and a 2004 Ford Focus collided Wednesday around noon at the intersection of County Roads 370 and 378 near Athens. Fortunately, no injuries were reported in the crash.

Emergency crews from Niotra Rural Fire and Englewood Rural Fire responded to the scene, along with McMinn County Sheriff's Deputy Bryan Powers, who conducted the investigation.

*Photos by Lynn Ingram, Englewood Rural Fire Dept.*



## Community News You Can Use

- The McMinn County Library Board will meet on Monday evening, July 28, 2025, at 6:00pm. The meeting will be held at the E.G. Fisher Public Library.
- McMinn Senior Activity Center will be having a dance on Saturday, August 2 @ 7p.m. Admission is \$5 per person. Doors open @ 6:45p.m.
- Attention McMinn County juniors, seniors, and parents — dual enrollment registration for Cleveland State Community College is upon us! Students can pre-register for any dual enrollment course at the Cleveland State Athens campus on:
  - **Monday, July 28 and Tuesday, July 29** from 9:00 AM–12:00 PM and 4:00–7:00 PM
  - **Wednesday, July 30** from 4:00–7:00 PM

There will also be a registration session at McMinn County High School on **Monday, August 12** from 9:00 AM–12:00 PM. For more information, contact **Renae Frazier** at [dualenrollment@clevelandstateecc.edu](mailto:dualenrollment@clevelandstateecc.edu) or call 423-614-8734.

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Monday, July 28, 2025

Morning Fax®...Today's News This Morning Page 3

Athens, Tennessee

## Motorcyclist Airlifted After Hit-and-Run Crash on Hwy 307



A motorcyclist was seriously injured Wednesday when a vehicle pulled out of County Road 364 in Sweetwater and struck a 2007 Kawasaki EX6 traveling along Highway 307. The impact pushed the motorcycle approximately 20 feet with the driver still trapped underneath, according to emergency responders.

The driver of the vehicle fled the scene, prompting a hit-and-run investigation by the Tennessee Highway Patrol.

The motorcyclist was treated at the scene by AMR personnel before being airlifted to Erlanger Medical Center via LifeForce helicopter, which landed at the crash site. A passenger on the motorcycle declined medical transport. Parts of Highway 307 were shut down for about four hours as the THP Critical Incident Response Team conducted a detailed investigation.

Emergency crews from Niota Rural Fire, Englewood Rural Fire, Athens Rural Fire, and the McMinn County Sheriff's Department responded. Englewood Rural Fire Chief Billy Roach was in command of the scene. The investigation is being led by THP Trooper Travis Ryans.

*Photo by Lynn Ingram, Englewood Rural Fire Dept.*

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5TH GRADE

JULY 30TH - 5-6:30 P.M.

5-5:30

GRADE LEVEL MEETING IN CAFETERIA TO DISCUSS 5TH GRADE

5:30-5:45

TRANSITION

5:45-6:30

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Monday, July 28, 2025

Page 4

Athens, Tennessee

## Driver Injured After Crashing Into Ditch on County Road 405



The driver of an Infiniti G35 was injured Sunday after failing to navigate a curve while traveling on County Road 405 near Athens, sending the vehicle into a ditch.

The driver was transported to Starr Regional Medical Center in Athens by AMR for treatment.

Responding agencies included Englewood Rural Fire, Niota Rural Fire, Athens Rural Fire, and the McMinn County Sheriff's Department. Englewood Rural Fire Chief Billy Roach was in command at the scene. Tennessee Highway Patrol Sgt. Kyle Millsaps is investigating the crash.

*Photo by Lynn Ingram, Englewood Rural Fire Dept.*

## Early Morning Rollover on Hwy 411 Leaves Driver with Minor Injuries



Around 4:30 a.m. Saturday, the driver of a 2018 Dodge Ram 2500 lost control while heading north on Highway 411 near County Road 508 in Englewood. The

truck overcorrected, rolling multiple times before coming to a stop in the median. The driver sustained minor scratches and bruises and was treated at the scene by AMR personnel but declined transport to the hospital.

Emergency crews from Englewood Rural Fire Department, the McMinn County Sheriff's Department, and the Tennessee Highway Patrol responded. THP Trooper Scott Freeman is investigating the crash.

*Photo by Lynn Ingram, Englewood Rural Fire Dep.*

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Monday, July 28, 2025

Morning Fax®...Today's News This Morning Page 5

Athens, Tennessee

### THP asking for help finding driver who hit motorcyclist in McMinn County

The Tennessee Highway Patrol is asking for help finding the driver who hit a motorcyclist in McMinn County Thursday morning.

The motorcyclist who was hit on highway 307 near County Road 364 in McMinn County was seriously hurt, according to THP. They say the driver did not stop.

THP is looking for a gold or champagne Ford F-150 model year somewhere between 2009 and 2014.

The truck is missing its front license plate holder, and a black bumper insert on the driver's side could have damage to the front fender, or could even blue paint on it.

THP says the truck was last seen heading north on Highway 307, towards Sweetwater.

If you've seen anything or know something, please call THP's dispatch at (423) 954-2130.

Originally Published by [WTVC NewsChannel9](http://WTVC.com)

## Obituaries

**Janice Margaret Myers Smelcer**, 75 of McMinn County, passed away on Thursday, July 24. She was a member of Valley Road Baptist Church. Visitation will be held from 5:00 PM-7:00 PM on Monday, July 28, at Ziegler Funeral Home with a funeral service to follow at 7:00 PM. Graveside services will be held at 11:00 AM on Tuesday, July 29 at McMinn Memory Gardens. Ziegler Funeral Home has been entrusted with serving the family of Janice Margaret Myers Smelcer.

**David Arlen Johnson**, 84 of Etowah, TN passed away Friday, July 25. David was honorably discharged after serving two years in the United States Army. He was employed at the Alaska Department of Fish and Game as a State of Alaska Biologist. The family will receive friends from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m., Sunday, July 27 in the Chapel of Bordwine Funeral Home. Bordwine Funeral Home of Etowah is in charge of arrangements.

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