

Aaron Hernandez's Conviction Overturned after His Suicide



Summary: With former NFL star Aaron Hernandez no longer able to appeal his conviction, Massachusetts law dictates that convictions can be nullified.

Even though former New England Patriots star Aaron Hernandez is dead, a Massachusetts judge elected to overturn his murder conviction. Hernandez, 27, was convicted of murdering an acquaintance in 2013. His attorney argued the dismissal of his conviction was warranted since he died before exhausting the appeal process.

Hernandez used a bed sheet attached to a cell window to hang himself. He had first used several items to block the door, preventing anyone from trying to save him. His brain has been donated to Boston University for research. Scientists want to see if there are any signs of head trauma from playing football.

Massachusetts state law allows for a conviction to be questioned when it is fully appealed due to death. Prosecutors felt differently since Hernandez committed suicide in prison so his death was a “conscious, deliberate and voluntary act.” They believe his death should have prevented a judge from overturning the conviction. The former National Football League tight end was serving a life sentence for the death of Odin Lloyd in June 2013. He hung himself in his prison cell last month, shocking family and the public since just days before he was found not guilty of a double murder in 2012.

Superior Court Judge Susan Garsh oversaw the 2015 trial where a jury found him guilty of fatally shooting Lloyd in an industrial park near his home in North Attleborough, Massachusetts. Garsh said, “This court cannot know why Hernandez chose to end his life. There being no reason to recognize any exception in this case in the interest of justice the court has no choice” but to overturn the conviction.

When Hernandez was arrested in June 2013 for the murder, he had a \$41 million NFL contract. In a note he left for his fiancée, Shayanna Jenkins Hernandez, he wrote, “you’re rich.” This note indicates that money may have been a motivating factor for the star to end his life. However, the NFL plays by a different set of rules so even though Hernandez has a clear record right now, his contract likely included a conduct clause. The Patriots only have to prove that Hernandez’s conduct was not becoming of the team, forfeiting any claim his estate has to his bonus and salary. Without that money, the value of his estate is very little, according to experts. The *Boston Herald* reports that his estate is basically worthless with only his mansion in Massachusetts holding any value. *CBS Boston* reported last month that an offer of \$1.3 million was made on the mansion.

Hernandez was facing several civil lawsuits from the families of the men he was accused of murdering. He was cleared in the deaths of two Cape Verdean nationals, Safiro Furtado and Daniel Abreu. It is unclear what role his death and the overturned conviction will play in those cases. With his death and his criminal conviction nullified, his remaining financial assets may be protected. The plaintiffs would have to find a way to prove that Hernandez is liable for the deaths in order to receive any damages and with very little money in the estate to go after, it may not be worth the effort.

Prosecutors presented a troubled man with drug problems and paranoia during the trial. Thomas Quinn, the Bristol County District Attorney told reporters that they plan to appeal Garsh’s decision. Quinn said, “It is fair to conclude based on what was presented that it was a knowing decision that he had thought about and acted upon.” Lloyd’s mother, Ursula Ward said, “In our book, he’s guilty and he’s going to always be guilty. No one wins today.”

Do you think families should be entitled to damages even when the person responsible for the deaths has no money? Tell us in the comments below.

To learn more about Hernandez’s path through the courts, read these articles:

- [NFL Star Aaron Hernandez Not Guilty in Double Homicide](#)
- [Evidence Suppressed in Aaron Hernandez Case](#)
- [Aaron Hernandez: Guilty of Murder](#)

