

Jan. 6 Defendant Takes His Own Life, Died of 'Broken Heart,' Family Says

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Matthew Perna, 37, was prosecuted for his 20-minute walk through the US Capitol

by [Joseph M. Hanneman](#), *The Epoch Times*

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Matthew L. Perna, a Pennsylvania man prosecuted for his 20-minute walk through the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, took his own life on Feb. 25 due to “a broken heart” and a justice system that “killed his spirit and his zest for life,” his family said.

Perna, 37, of Sharpsville, was due to be sentenced on April 1 in U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., in a plea agreement on charges of obstruction of an official proceeding, aiding and abetting, entering, and remaining in a restricted building or grounds, disorderly and disruptive conduct in a restricted building or grounds, and disorderly conduct in a Capitol building. One charge is a felony and the others are misdemeanors.

Perna learned that prosecutors would seek an even longer jail sentence based on “domestic terrorism deterrence,” Julie Kelly of American Greatness wrote on Twitter on Feb. 27.

“His community (which he loved), his country, and the justice system killed his spirit and his zest for life,” his online

obituary reads.

“He didn’t break, touch, or steal anything. He did not harm anyone, as he stayed within the velvet ropes taking pictures,” the obituary said. “For this act, he has been persecuted by many members of his community, friends, relatives, and people who had never met him.”

‘His Spirit Died’

“The constant delays in hearings and postponements dragged out for over a year,” the obituary said. “Because of this, Matt’s heart broke and his spirit died, and many people are responsible for the pain he endured.

Geri Perna, Matthew Perna’s aunt, said the tragedy was “beyond devastating.” “Matt did not have a hateful bone in his body. He embraced people of all races, income brackets, and beliefs, never once berating anyone for having different views.”

“He was the kindest person you ever met,” she told The Epoch Times. “He was not like some of those rioters who went there acting obnoxious. No, that wasn’t our Matthew.”

Geri said the family never understood why the U.S. Department of Justice filed a felony charge in the case.

“He didn’t have a weapon. He didn’t have an altercation with police officers. He didn’t break anything or steal anything or take anything,” she said.

The prosecutor’s sentencing recommendations haven’t been posted online yet. Charging documents said Perna and Stephen Ayres entered the Capitol at 2:47 p.m., nearly 30 minutes after Congress adjourned due to rioting, and nearly an hour after Vice President Mike Pence’s motorcade was seen leaving the Capitol, court records show. Perna remained in the building for 20 minutes, filming with his phone.

At one point during his time in the Capitol, according to a

government "statement of facts," on Jan. 18, 2021, Perna "became frustrated and, using a metal pole, tapped on a window of the Capitol building." Court records don't allege that he damaged the window or any other property, or committed any violent or disruptive acts.

Prosecutors wrote that Perna wore a red Make America Great Again sweatshirt and chanted "USA! USA! USA!" while filming with his phone.

Perna later uploaded an 8-minute video to Facebook, in which he allegedly said, "It's not over, trust me. The purpose of today was to expose Pence as a traitor."

Two unnamed informants who said they were familiar with Perna called the FBI on Jan. 13, 2021, after recognizing him in videos posted online. One alleged that Perna purchased a handgun in the previous several months, court records show. There is no indication Perna had any type of weapon with him on Jan. 6, even if the informant's allegation was true.

The second informant "believed he [Perna] was a conspiracy theorist and supported Q-Anon," the FBI said in court documents. Prosecutors described Q as a "sprawling, discredited, anti-establishment conspiracy theory" that says the world is run by "a cabal of Satan-worshiping pedophiles and child traffickers." Two unnamed informants who said they were familiar with Perna called the FBI on Jan. 13, 2021, after recognizing him in videos posted online. One alleged that Perna purchased a handgun in the previous several months, court records show. There is no indication Perna had any type of weapon with him on Jan. 6, even if the informant's allegation was true.

Charging documents said the 'Q' theory is a "false belief."

Perna approached the FBI on Jan. 14, 2021, as soon as he heard that his photo was posted as No. 73 on the FBI's Jan. 6 most-wanted list. He met with agents at his home the same day. He

told them the Capitol doors were wide open when he approached the building, and that a group behind him and Ayres was pushing forward to get in.

Matthew Perna went to Washington, D.C., on Jan. 6 to “peacefully stand up for his beliefs,” the obituary said.

Matthew Lawrence Perna was born in March 1984 to Lawrence and Veronica Perna. He graduated from Sharpsville High School in 2002 and later earned a degree from Penn State University. He taught English to children in Thailand and South Korea, his obituary said. He traveled widely in Europe, Asia, South America, India, and around the United States. His mother, Veronica ‘Roni’ Perna, 59, died in March 2015.

Jan. 6 Takes a Grim Toll

One prominent Jan. 6 defendant took to Twitter on Feb. 27 to say he understands the pressure that Perna must have felt with his case dragging on so long.

“I don’t know Matthew Perna, haven’t studied his case or accusations against him. But he’s killed himself & I understand why,” wrote Brandon Straka, the founder of the WalkAway campaign that encourages liberals to leave the Democratic Party. “I had the same thoughts many times this past year. The deafening silence of Republicans & conservative media for ppl dragged through this hell is unbearable.”

Straka was sentenced in January to three years of probation and fined \$5,000 as part of a plea agreement on one count of engaging in disorderly or disruptive conduct in a Capitol building.

Perna’s suicide is a grim reminder of the ongoing toll from Jan. 6 and its aftermath.

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