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Russian Investigators Refuse to Open Criminal Proceedings Over Navalny's Death, Widow Says

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Alexei Navalny. **Mitya Aleshkovskiy (CC BY-SA 2.0)**

Russian law enforcement authorities refused to launch a criminal investigation into the death of the late Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, his widow said Thursday, citing a letter she received from investigators.

In February, Navalny died under unclear circumstances at the "Polar Wolf" penal colony, where he was serving a 19-year prison sentence on a string of extremism charges.

Navalny's spokeswoman said at the time that investigators had not determined his cause of death, while his mother said she was told he died of "sudden death syndrome." Russia's state-funded broadcaster RT cited an unnamed source claiming that the activist died of a "blood clot."

Yulia Navalnaya said she received a letter from investigators last week detailing a series of

steps they took to determine what caused her husband's death. The three-page document was dated July 26 and signed by Alexander Varapayev, an investigator in the Yamal-Nenets autonomous district where the Polar Wolf penal colony is located.

"Refuse to initiate criminal proceedings upon the discovery of A.A. Navalny's body due to the absence of an offense," the document concluded.

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Varapayev said a range of illnesses ostensibly led to Navalny's death, adding that forensic medical and toxicological examinations "did not find any poisonous or toxic substances" in his body.

"The death of... A.A. Navalny is not criminal in nature, but was the result of combined diseases," the document said.

Navalny's mother previously said that Varapayev was among those law enforcement officials who had refused to hand over the dissident's body and pressured her to hold a secret funeral.

Navalnaya called the investigator's letter an attempt to "hide what really happened" and accused the Russian authorities of refusing to hand over his personal belongings, security camera footage and medical reports.

"As long as Putin is in power, the Investigative Committee and the FSB will not conduct any investigation," Navalnaya said, referring to two Russian law enforcement agencies.

"That's why we'll continue the investigation ourselves," she said.

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