



COUNCIL OF
ELIZABETH FRY SOCIETIES
OF ONTARIO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Inquest into the Death of Delilah Blair: Outrage and Heartbreak Are Not Enough

(Windsor, Ontario), June 23rd, 2022: The crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls is inextricably linked to the ways in which the state continues to disproportionately punish and incarcerate Indigenous women and girls. Earlier this week, an inquest began into the death of Delilah Blair – a 30-year-old Indigenous woman who died while in custody at the South West Detention Centre (SWDC). Blair's death makes the connection between these crises heartbreakingly clear and requires action on the part of all levels of government.

Indigenous women now account for 50% of all federally incarcerated women, according to the Office of the Correctional Investigator. The number of Indigenous women, and Indigenous people of all genders, has continued to rise even as the overall federal prison population is in decline. The ongoing over-incarceration of Indigenous peoples, and in particular Indigenous women, is part of the colonial and genocidal past and present of the Canadian state.

“We have seen the reports and we have heard the commitments from government – now we need action. Outrage and heartbreak are not enough – we need real change”, said Emilie Coyle, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS).

CAEFS works to address the persistent ways in which women and gender-diverse people impacted by criminalization are denied humanity and excluded from community. As part of this work, CAEFS monitors conditions of confinement in the federal prisons designated for women. Coyle is in Windsor today as both CAEFS and the Council of Elizabeth Fry Societies of Ontario (CEFSO) have standing in this inquest. CEFSO is the provincial voice for eight Elizabeth Fry Societies in Ontario and monitors the conditions of confinement in provincial jails designated for women. This inquest directly engages issues relevant to CEFSO and CAEFS: to support and advocate for criminalized women and gender-diverse people, and to work towards a world without prisons with strong and well-resourced communities.

An inquest is automatically triggered under the Coroners Act when someone dies in custody. The inquest began on June 20th, 2022 and is scheduled until June 30th, 2022. The purpose of an inquest is to determine the circumstances of a death, and to establish recommendations by the jury aimed at preventing a similar death from occurring again. The recommendations are not binding. However, they carry moral weight, and if implemented, can lead to important systemic change and the reduction of harm to others.

“We have learned that Delilah Blair died while still awaiting sentencing and without being granted meaningful access to family. This is unacceptable and unjust. We need everyone involved in the criminal justice system to be invested in keeping people – especially Indigenous women – out from behind bars and

home with their families and in spaces where they can heal”, said Cory Roslyn, president of the CEFSO and executive director of the Elizabeth Fry Society of Northeastern Ontario.



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For Comment:

Emily Lam
Counsel for CAEFS and CEFSO
elam@kastnerlam.com
416-655-3044 x810

Akosua Matthews
Counsel for CAEFS and CEFSO
Amatthews@kastnerlam.com
416-655-3044 x 814