



**COUNCIL OF
ELIZABETH FRY SOCIETIES
OF ONTARIO**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Recommendations in Inquest into the Death of Delilah Blair: Systemic Change Is Needed

Monday, July 25th, 2022 (Ottawa, Ontario): On June 30th, 2022, jurors came to a decision and made 38 recommendations in the inquest into the death of Delilah Blair. Delilah Blair was a 30-year-old Indigenous woman who died while in custody at the South West Detention Centre (SWDC). The jury determined that Blair died by suicide, however her family is certain that her death was an accident.

Recommendations were put forward by Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) and the Council of Elizabeth Fry Societies of Ontario (CEFSO), who both had standing in the 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. CAEFS supports and advocates for criminalized women and gender-diverse people, and works toward a world without prisons with strong and well-resourced communities. This inquest directly engages issues relevant to both CEFSO and CAEFS.

What is clear is that Blair's death was a preventable tragedy. CAEFS and CEFSO welcome some of the recommendations made by the jury, and are also calling for more systemic change related to solitary confinement, preventative resources, and the disproportionate incarceration of Indigenous people, while focusing on the ways in which incarceration harms overall.

Abolish All Forms of Solitary Confinement

Segregation is defined internationally and nationally as any type of custody where a person is in highly restricted conditions for 22 to 24 hours or does not receive a minimum of two hours meaningful social interaction each day, excluding circumstances of an unscheduled lockdown. By this definition, Blair died in conditions of segregation. CAEFS and CEFSO remain particularly concerned about the ongoing harm of solitary confinement inside both federal prisons and provincial jails.

"Any practice of solitary confinement has detrimental impacts on mental health and wellbeing, which are exacerbated when the person being confined is already experiencing acute distress," said Cory Roslyn, president of CEFSO. "We cannot continue to use isolation as a response to mental health crises in prison – the consequences of doing so can be, and have been, fatal. It is time that we do away with all forms of solitary confinement".

Implement Upstream Supports and Preventative Resources

Blair, like many people who become incarcerated, was unable to access the treatment that she was requesting, in community. CAEFS and CEFSO are just two of many organizations, communities, and individuals calling for a divestment from prisons and an investment in community resources as a more effective way of preventing and addressing harm.

“In order to prevent harm from happening, we cannot solely focus on the conditions inside of prisons. We must consider the systemic failures that resulted in Delilah Blair’s death” said Emilie Coyle, Executive Director of CAEFS. “Many women and gender-diverse people are imprisoned because of a lack of up-stream resources in community, including: a guaranteed livable income; robust and accessible mental health care; and safe, harm-reduction centered supports for drug-users”.

End the Over-Incarceration of Indigenous People

Indigenous women now account for 50% of all federally incarcerated women. This percentage is often higher in provincial prisons, particularly in northern communities and in the Prairies. The ongoing disproportionate incarceration of Indigenous peoples, and in particular Indigenous women, is part of the colonial and genocidal past and present of the Canadian state.

“The response to the growing number of Indigenous people in prison cannot be rooted in the Indigenization of prisons. Prisons are inherently violent and colonial. We have heard from many of the people that we work with and advocate alongside that ceremonies and Indigenous practices are coopted and securitized by the prison”, commented Cory Roslyn, President of CEFSSO. “It is incumbent on all levels of government and the judiciary to make good on existing legislation that are designed to prevent the incarceration of Indigenous people whenever possible – not just ensure that so-called culturally relevant programming is available to them while in prison”.

END

For Comment:

Emilie Coyle
Executive Director, Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies
ecoyle@caefs.ca
613-316-6785

Cory Roslyn
President, Council of Elizabeth Fry Societies of Ontario
croslyn@efryneo.com
705-923-4521

Emily Lam
Counsel with Kastner Lam
elam@kastnerlam.com
416-655-3044 x 810

Akosua Matthews
Counsel with Kastner Lam
Amatthews@kastnerlam.com
416-655-3044 x 814

