



January 23, 2017

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
ALBERTA

Don McDermid, Chair
Fatality Review Board
c/o Office of the Chief Medical Examiner
7007 - 116th Street N.W.
Edmonton, AB T6H 5R8

Dr. David Swann, MLA
Calgary-Mountain View Constituency

Dear Mr. McDermid:

I am writing to request that the Fatality Review Board recommend to the Minister of Justice that a public fatality inquiry be held regarding all deaths involving controlled substances in Alberta correctional and remand facilities since January 1, 2012.

As you are aware, section 35(1) of the Fatality Inquiries Act authorizes the Minister to order that a judge conduct a public fatality inquiry into a death or "2 or more deaths that arose out of the same or similar circumstances." The common thread in all these cases is that inmates have died as a direct result of controlled substances – increasingly, opioids – being smuggled into correctional facilities.

A public fatality inquiry is urgently needed to identify present shortcomings and emerging best practices relative to preventing contraband from entering our correctional and remand facilities. Similarly, I submit that any such inquiry must also include a thorough examination of correctional staff training in mental health and addictions as well as the medical resources available to incarcerated persons. In other words, it's not enough to focus solely on the detection and confiscation of contraband; death prevention must also include efforts to reduce the demand for controlled substances in correctional facilities through effective mental health and addictions treatment options.

This request for a public fatality inquiry stems, in part, from recent correspondence I have had with the Office of the Chief of the Edmonton Police Service whereby it was brought to my attention that there has been a significant rise in drug-related occurrences at Edmonton-area correctional institutions from 2015 (65 investigations with 33 criminal charges) to 2016 (127 investigations with 64 criminal charges – to December 23, 2016). Given the widespread and growing impact of the opioid crisis in Alberta, it's highly unlikely that such a dramatic increase in year-over-year numbers is limited to the Capital Region – making the case for a comprehensive inquiry even more compelling.

It is imperative that we understand more about the capacity of correctional officers to screen, detect and protect themselves from opioids and other controlled substances, as well as protect those in custody, whether in provincial jails or remand centres.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Dr. David Swann, Leader
Alberta Liberal Opposition

c.c. The Honourable Kathleen Ganley, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General
The Honourable Sarah Hoffman, Minister of Health