



ALBERTA
JUSTICE AND SOLICITOR GENERAL

*Office of the Minister
MLA, Calgary - Buffalo*

AR 21334

FEB 02 2017

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FEB 03 2017

**Alberta Liberal
Opposition Caucus**

Dr. David Swann
Leader, Alberta Liberal Caucus
#6015, 9820 107 Street
Edmonton AB T5K 1E7

Dear Dr. Swann:

Thank you for your letter to the Honourable Rachel Notley, Premier of Alberta, regarding reports concerning deaths due to overdoses in remand and correctional facilities in Alberta. As Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, I am pleased to respond on her behalf. I certainly share your concern regarding the harms of opioid drugs and recognize the dangers they present in our remand and correctional facilities.

With regard to your concerns about an increase in suspected drug overdose incidents in our remand and correctional facilities, I can offer the following information. Although there has been an increase in reported incidents of suspected drug overdoses, illicit drugs within correctional facilities has been a long standing issue and requires long term solutions. I believe that the increase in overdose incidents are not due to an increase in the amount of drug contraband being introduced into the centres, but rather from the introduction of Fentanyl- a more potent and dangerous drug that is more likely to cause an overdose incident when used by an inmate.

The Correctional Services Division does employ a variety of strategies to combat the introduction of illicit drugs into correctional facilities. When an inmate is admitted into a centre, they are subjected to a search of their person followed by a full strip search when they are changed into institutional clothing. These methods are effective at intercepting any drugs which may be affixed to the inmate's body or hidden within their clothing.

In addition, upon admission into custody Alberta Health Services (AHS) conducts an opiate drug use screening for every inmate who is being admitted into custody. Those who are interviewed and self-reported to be opiate users must complete a naloxone administration education package, and will then have a naloxone kit placed in their property which they can access upon their

release from custody.

One common method of drug introduction to a centre is done by the inmate ingesting the drugs or concealing them within a body cavity. As this method of introduction can be very difficult to detect, centre staff depend on intelligence gathering, scheduled unit searches, and the use of centre drug dog teams to recover any drug or contraband that was not detected upon admission.

Centre staff may also assign an inmate to a dry cell placement if there is strong suspicion based on factual evidence that an individual is concealing drugs within their person. If an inmate is placed on dry cell protocol, they are separated from the inmate population until they expel the contraband from their body.

In addition to these security procedures, all provincial centres have engaged collaboratively with the AHS to provide addictions and mental health treatment and/or education to inmates, which include both general and more specific information on the harms of Fentanyl use. Educational posters as well as electronic presentations which show the extreme dangers of Fentanyl use are offered in areas of the centres that are mostly populated. As mentioned previously harm reduction is prioritized by providing naloxone information and kits to those in custody.

You have indicated in your letter that you believe, based on trends outside of corrections, that most inmate deaths should also be attributed to overdose from the use of opiates. Here are the most recent numbers we have regarding drug related inmate deaths between January 1, 2016 and January 27, 2017. Out of ten inmate deaths:

- two have been confirmed to have been attributed to drug overdose
- two have been attributed to natural causes
- six cases remain pending investigation

Your perception that front line staff are ill-prepared to deal with emergency situations within the centres is unfortunate. Although the stresses for the correctional peace officers cannot be understated, training and support strategies are in place to protect and ensure the good health of front line correctional staff. They are first responders in emergency situations and are trained as such. A comprehensive team of correctional and health care staff are selected from each working shift and designated to immediately respond to any emergency situation within the centre with additional support through the deployment of emergency medical services (EMS) staff. Health care staff are equipped to respond with naloxone (Narcan), and in centres that do not have 24-hour health care coverage, EMS staff are contacted and deployed. Additionally, critical incident debriefing, peer support, and other benefits are mobilized to assist staff who require further follow up to any incident involvement.

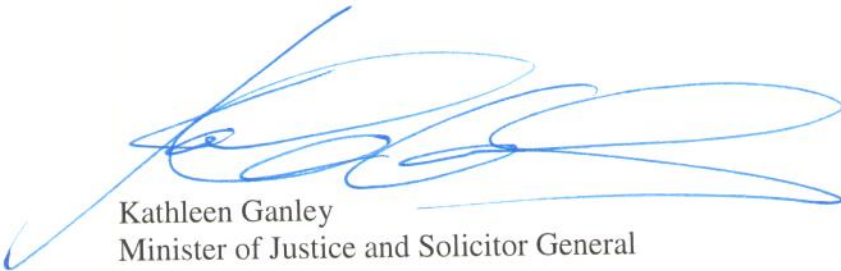
You are correct in acknowledging the regulations under the *Fatality Inquiries Act* that states inquiries are completed whenever there is a death in custody. In addition, the Assistant Deputy Minister of Correctional Services Division also establishes a Board of Inquiry to conduct an in-depth internal investigation to identify any recommendations that may prevent a similar

require further follow up to any incident involvement.

You are correct in acknowledging the regulations under the *Fatality Inquiries Act* that states inquiries are completed whenever there is a death in custody. In addition, the Assistant Deputy Minister of Correctional Services Division also establishes a Board of Inquiry to conduct an in-depth internal investigation to identify any recommendations that may prevent a similar incident from happening in the future.

I remain confident that the Correctional Services Division within my ministry and frontline staff are working professionally and diligently to manage this challenging and complex issue. My ministry is continually exploring all possible options to improve our detection of these substances, and prevent their introduction into our correctional centres. I certainly share your concern about the deadly consequences of these highly potent and dangerous drugs and will continue to work towards addressing the issue both within the community and in Alberta's correctional facilities.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Ganley
Minister of Justice and Solicitor General

cc: Honourable Rachel Notley, Premier of Alberta