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January 31, 2014

Chief Constable Jim Chu
Vancouver Police Department
3585 Graveley Street
Vancouver, BC V5K 5J5

Dear Chief Chu,

The BC Schizophrenia Society is currently in the process of reviewing recommendations relating to mental illness made by the BC Coroners Service. As an organization dedicated to supporting families coping with mental illness and its devastating effects, the BC Schizophrenia Society has a keen interest in recommendations that can improve responses to mental illness within the health and justice systems.

I am writing to inquire how the Vancouver Police Department has responded to the recommendations noted below:

Inquest held at the Coroner's Court in Burnaby, BC March 11th and 12th, 2013 into the death of Duncan Leslie Roy Smears (File No. 2011:0278:0202)
<http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/coroners/schedule/archive/2013/docs/verdict-smears-2013-03-12.pdf>

Recommendation:

That officers, particularly patrol officers, should receive specific training in dealing with and assisting individuals with addictions/mental health issues.

Coroner's Comments: Mr. Smears was suffering from an illicit drug addiction and addiction related mental health issues.

Inquest held at the Coroners Court in Burnaby, BC February 6th to 8th, 2012 into the death of Laurent Pierre Parrouty (File No. 2010:0274:0167)
<http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/coroners/schedule/archive/2012/docs/verdict-parrouty-2012-02-08.pdf>

Recommendation:

Within 8 hours a caregiver or caseworker should be allowed to visit the prisoner for a brief period (approximately 15 minutes) for the purpose of

advising him/her what is happening and to reassure them in order to assist in reducing their stress levels.

Coroner's Comments: This may serve to avoid needless distress on the part of low functioning individuals.

Inquest held at the Coroner's Court in Burnaby, BC December 13th to 17th, 2010 into the death of Paul Glenn Boyd (File No. 2007:270:0809)

<http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/coroners/schedule/archive/2010/docs/verdict-boyd-2007-0270-0809.pdf>

Recommendation:

We recommend the establishment of a joint databank between the mental health department and the Vancouver Police Department of people with mental health issues.

Coroner's Comments: The jury heard evidence that police officers often encounter individuals with known mental health issues and that this information may not be available to the officers at the first response level.

Recommendation:

We recommend increased mandatory training for police officers interacting with persons suffering from mental health issues with emphasis on effective de-escalation tactics.

Coroner's Comments: The jury heard evidence that VPD patrol officers regularly encounter individuals with mental health issues while in the performance of their duties.

The jury also heard expert evidence in the area of use of force by police personnel and the need for police officers to assess a threatening situation on an ongoing basis and de-escalate the level of force used as the threat against themselves or others is reduced.

The jury heard evidence that not all VPD officers are trained in the use of and/or provided with intermediate weapons such as Tasers and "beanbag" shotguns.

I appreciate your attention to this request and look forward to receiving a response by February 28, 2014.

Sincerely,



Dave Halikowski
BC Schizophrenia Society Chair