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Senators for Ontario*

Statement of 46 Senators

All Too Familiar: The Urgent Need for Mental Health Interventions NOT Jail to Prevent Homicides

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 14, 2023 (Ottawa) – On Tuesday, the Inquest Jury in the death of Soleiman Faqiri echoed the 2012 verdict and findings of the inquest into the death of Ashley Smith.

Soleiman Faqiri died in the Central East Correctional Centre on December 15, 2016. He suffered from schizoaffective disorder and despite a court order to transfer him to a psychiatric facility, he died in a segregation cell at the hands of staff who were tasked with his care.

Eleven years after the release of comparable findings about the federal prison system, the Faqiri jury found the provincial pre-trial detention system equally lacking and reiterated an all too common refrain that those with mental health issues should not be jailed. Most particularly, the jury underscored that given the very nature of the manner in which behaviours symptomatic of mental illness are characterized in prisons as evidence of criminal behaviour, **prisons are not and must not be permitted to substitute as treatment centres.**

Soleiman's story is a reminder of the continuing need to provide robust and proactive mental health supports in Ontario and throughout Canada, the irreversible impact of segregation in prison and the incompatibility of mental health issues and punishment. We need action, not more inquests into entirely preventable deaths.

We can and must remedy the injustices and inequalities revealed in successive inquests. To this end, we call on politicians, judges and policy makers to learn to work together to fulfill multiple decades of promises to remedy past wrongs and make Canada a global human rights leader in the creation of fair, equitable and just social, economic, health and legal systems.

Signed by:

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