

January 12, 2013

Mr. Matt Brown, Regional Coroner
5th Floor, 910 Government Street
Victoria, BC V8X 3W4

Dear Mr. Matt Brown,

We write to you as a concerned community organization to report over 30 deaths among Victoria's homeless community that occurred during the summer and fall months of 2012. We are law students and members of the University of Victoria's Poverty Law Club (PLC). The PLC works to address issues of poverty and homelessness in Victoria, and to raise awareness of these issues within the law school community. We are also a member of the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition, a coalition of concerned organizations working to see the introduction of a poverty reduction plan in British Columbia.

We are reporting these 30 deaths to you because we believe that it is in the public interest that this class of deaths be reported. These deaths represent a three-fold increase in the number of deaths among the homeless community in Victoria during the summer and fall months.ⁱ

In reporting these deaths, we are asking your office to conduct an investigation, pursuant to section 7 of the Coroners Act ('the Act'). We hope that this investigation will lead you to recommend to the chief coroner, Lisa Lapointe, that an inquest be held. An inquest would provide an opportunity to look into the broader causes of the dramatic increase in deaths among Victoria's homeless community, and generate recommendations to prevent similar deaths from occurring in the future. It would also provide an opportunity for public engagement, and to develop community-based responses to this pressing issue.

It is clearly within the chief coroner's mandate to direct that an inquest be held when "the public has an interest in being informed of the circumstances surrounding the death[s]" or when "the death[s] resulted from a dangerous practice or circumstance, and similar deaths could be prevented if recommendations were made to the public or an authority" (s. 18 (3) of the Act). We believe that the public has an interest in being informed of the circumstances surrounding the deaths among Victoria's homeless community; and that improvements in services and supports available to homeless people in Victoria could prevent similar deaths from occurring in the future. This could include improvements in the quantity and quality of housing and beds available to Victoria's homeless community, among other things.

Beyond conducting an inquiry, it is within the chief coroner's mandate to establish death review panels to review the facts and circumstances of a class of deaths in order to prevent similar deaths from occurring in the future (s. 49 (1) (b) of the Act).. Death review panels can also provide advice to the chief coroner "respecting...medical, legal,

social welfare and other matters that may impact public health and safety” (s. 49 (1) (a) of the Act).

Ultimately, the Poverty Law Club would like to see action taken in response to the significant increase in the number of deaths among Victoria’s homeless community this past summer and fall. That three times as many people as usual died in this period can not go unrecognized or unaddressed. Thank you for your time and we look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

University of Victoria Poverty Law Club

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ⁱ The fact that homeless people in Victoria died at three times the usual rate this past summer was first brought to our attention in a Times Colonist article from September 27, 2012, and was subsequently confirmed to us by the Executive Director of Our Place Society, Don Evans, in an interview with him on Friday, November 2, 2012.