

*The Honourable Kim Pate, C.M
Senator for Ontario*

News Release

October 19, 2017

Statement on the 10th Anniversary of the Death of Ashley Smith

October 19, 2017 marks the 10th anniversary of the death of 19-year-old Ashley Smith, a young woman who died alone, while those tasked with her care and custody looked on. Her death was ruled preventable by the Office of the Correctional Investigator and a homicide by the jury at the inquest into her death. More women, men and youth have died preventable deaths in the ensuing decade.

The inquest into Ashley's death, Louise Arbour and the 1996 Commission of Inquiry into Certain Events at the Prison for Women in Kingston, the UN Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Canadian and Ontario Human Rights Commissions, the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, Native Women's Association of Canada, and the DisAbled Women's Network of Canada have all recognized solitary confinement and segregation as deeply inhumane practices, particularly for women, Indigenous prisoners and those with mental health issues.

Last year, the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies petitioned the government to review and remedy the cases of all women prisoners placed in segregation in federal prisons over the past five years. The petition, as part of a larger push to end segregation in Canada, was met with commitment by the Minister of Public Safety to take "meaningful action, including examining legislative reforms, to address the overreliance on administrative segregation – particularly as it pertains to vulnerable populations." The Minister of Public Safety has also been mandated to implement the recommendations from the Ashley Smith Inquest and reduce incarceration. Recently introduced Bill C-56 claims it will further reduce reliance on segregation but history does not support this conclusion. The bill in its current state merely entrenches current practices.

On the anniversary of Ashley's death, Senator Pate made a statement in the Senate calling for immediate action to implement the recommendations and abolish segregation and all other forms of solitary confinement in Canada. She urges the government to remedy the injustices and inequalities faced by women, Indigenous and all racialized prisoners and those with disabling mental health issues.

Ashley's story is a reminder of the continuing need to address the irreversible impact of segregation on women in prison and the incompatibility of mental health issues and punishment. On October 19, Senator Pate calls on fellow Senators and Members of Parliament to commemorate Ashley, and work together to make Canada the global human rights leader, decarcerate and fulfill multiple decades of promises to remedy past wrongs.

For more information:

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