

**MINISTRY OF JUSTICE
CORONERS SERVICE
BRIEFING NOTE**

PURPOSE: For INFORMATION for the Honourable Suzanne Anton, Attorney General and Minister of Justice.

ISSUE: The family of one of the Pickton victims is holding a media event this morning to share their concerns about the Coroners Service management of their family member's remains.

SUMMARY: Most of the remains of Pickton victims were returned to their relatives by the Coroners Service in 2010. Some bone fragments and pulverized bone were inexplicably not returned to some families at the time. The failure to return these remains in a timely manner has no impact on the criminal investigation which resulted in Mr. Pickton's conviction in 2007. Though they were not returned to the families when they should have been, the identified remains were always properly and securely stored and there is no question that identification of the deceased was definitive.

BACKGROUND:

- As a result of concerns raised by a family member of one of Pickton's victims, the Coroners Service undertook a thorough review in 2013 of its management of all human remains associated with the investigation.
- This review indicated that some of the remains of five Pickton victims were still being stored by the Coroners Service despite the conclusion of the criminal investigation and the release of custody by police. The remains consisted of miniscule bone fragments and powdered bone.
- Other remains were returned to nearest relatives and, in fact, some of the remains of these five individuals were also returned.
- The Coroners Service has undertaken efforts to contact the nearest relatives of the five victims to advise them of the existence of the remains and seek their direction with respect to disposition.
- To date, there has been contact with three of the families. Efforts are continuing to contact the remaining two families.
- There is no satisfactory explanation for the delay in return of all of the remains of all victims which should have been returned to families once identification of the deceased was confirmed and the police investigation was concluded.

- The Coroner with original jurisdiction in the investigation left the agency in September 2012, leaving no information to suggest all of the remains had not been returned. It was only when the s.22 was also one of Pickton's victims, later came forward with concerns, that the Chief Coroner ordered an internal review. Though unknown to current staff, the remains had been stored securely and safely within the Coroners Service exhibit room. Access to this room is limited to only 3 individuals in the agency.
- Those connected to the Pickton investigation are no longer with the Coroners Service and the current Chief Coroner and Deputies were appointed after 2010.
- The existence of the remains, while unknown to the family, had been known to the police and were part of the criminal investigation.
- There is no connection between the failure of the Coroners Service to return all remains to five families in a timely manner and the criminal investigation which concluded many years earlier.
- The Pickton investigation was unique in Coroners Service history and presented some significant challenges. Current practice and policy will ensure that the errors that occurred with respect to return of remains will not recur in the future.
- The Coroners Service has extended sincere apologies to the family members for any distress that delayed return of their loved ones has caused them.

OTHER MINISTRIES IMPACTED/CONSULTED:

- There may be questions raised to Crown Counsel concerning whether or not Crown could have brought forward additional cases for prosecution in the Pickton trial.

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