



August 31, 2010

Saskatchewan Public Complaints Commission
3rd Avenue North
Saskatoon, SK
S7K 2H6

VIA FAX: 604-257-3878

To the Public Complaints Commission of Saskatchewan:

RE: Three deaths in Saskatoon Police Department cells in ten months

I am writing on behalf of the B.C. Civil Liberties Association (“BCCLA”) to initiate a police complaint against the Saskatoon Police Service for a series of death in custody incidents in Saskatoon Police cells, three deaths in ten months.

We are concerned that one or a combination of the following errors, oversights or faulty policies has led to this disproportionate number of deaths, or that some other as yet unidentified issue has led to these deaths. Issues that we frequently observe in cells that can lead to death include:

Inadequate medical services in cells

Where there is not a registered nurse or doctor on staff at the jail on a twenty-four hour basis, police may not have access to immediate medical assistance for prisoners in medical distress, which can increase the risk of death in cells.

Inappropriate use of restraints, or use of inappropriate restraints

Where police or police supervised jail staff are using restraints that are not approved, or for which they are not properly trained, in order to respond to prisoner misconduct, restraint use can lead to death in cells.

Inappropriate or inadequate medical training for police constables or jail staff

Where police or police supervised jail staff do not have sufficient medical training themselves, they may not be able to identify conditions like: traumatic head injury, drug or alcohol overdose, diabetic insulin shock, hypo or hyperthermia, or any other life threatening conditions that may mimic non-life threatening conditions. This lack of medical training to identify early issues can lead to death in cells.

Insufficient or inadequate cell checks

Police must regularly check on prisoners in cells, especially those that have overdosed on alcohol or are under the influence of unknown drugs or otherwise acting unusually. The frequency of cell checks should be at least every ten minutes if not more frequently where staffing allows. Cell checks must be a physical check, not just a look at a camera monitor or an assumption that a prisoner is sleeping. In our experience, inadequate or infrequent cell checks are what most frequently lead to death in cells, and cells are all too often not monitored by cameras that record in order to assist in post mortem evaluations of what went wrong.

Inadequate cell conditions or construction

Cells may not be adequately designed to hold prisoners under the influence of drugs or alcohol, making suicide, self injury, or problematic behaviour more likely and less controllable. Improper cell design or conditions can lead to the use of inappropriate restraints, difficulty in conducting cell checks, or other issues.

What follows is a brief overview of the three deaths in custody that have led to this complaint. These overviews are taken from media reports and should not be taken to be the Association's view of what happened, or as fact. All facts surrounding these incidents should be investigated for systemic issues within the Saskatoon detachment.

Christopher Jason Hiebert – September 9, 2009

The Saskatoon Police Service arrested Christopher Jason Hiebert on the evening of September 9, 2009 on outstanding fraud and theft charges.¹ Despite media reports indicating Hiebert's mother informing officers that her son had ingested a dangerous amount of sleeping pills prior to his arrest, he died two hours later.

Brandon Travis Daniels – July 2, 2010

Brandon Travis Daniels, a 19 year old teenager, was arrested for public intoxication in downtown Saskatoon on July 2, 2010.² Twelve hours later, he was pronounced dead in his cell. Media reports indicate that Daniels' mother believes he was on medication whose side effects caused him to become glassy-eyed and confused — characteristics also commonly associated with alcohol intoxication.³

¹"Mom Queries Son's Death in Saskatoon Lockup," *CBC News*, July 6, 2010.

² Kathryn Blaze Carlson, "Teen Visiting Saskatoon Found Dead in Police Cell," *National Post*, July 5, 2010.

³ Betty Ann Adam, "Man Who Died in Cell was Sick: Mother," *The Star Phoenix*, July 6, 2010.

Unidentified man - July 17, 2010

Three weeks later, an unidentified 46-year-old man died after being arrested by Saskatoon Police Services for public intoxication.⁴ Media reports indicate that the man was suffering from a head injury, but are not specific as to the nature and extent of the injury. The injured man was placed in cells, went into medical distress, and died shortly afterwards at hospital.

We urge you to review these deaths promptly, before any other premature deaths take place in Saskatoon cells. An independent review, not an internal review by the police themselves, is required in this situation in order for the citizens served by the Saskatoon Police to be convinced that they are properly handling the most vulnerable of their charges, those prisoners who are injured, or suffering from drug or alcohol overdose.

We look forward to your response.

Yours truly,



Jason Gratl
Vice-President

cc.

Federation of Saskatchewan Indians, Special Investigations Unit, VIA
FAX: (306) 665-0134

Mayor Don Atchison, Chair, Saskatoon Police Department Board of
Police Commissioners, VIA FAX: (306) 975-3144

Chief Clive Weighill, Saskatoon Police Department, VIA FAX: (306)
975-8319

⁴ Betty Ann Adam, "Jail Death Sparks Review," *The Star Phoenix*, July 17, 2010