

JOINT COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT INTO DEATHS IN CUSTODY DAMNS CURRENT PRACTICE AND SUPPORTS PUBLIC INQUIRY CALL INTO DEATH OF 16-YEAR-OLD JOSEPH SCHOLES

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INQUEST welcomes the report 'Deaths in Custody' from the parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights published today. The report expresses serious concern about the numbers of deaths in custody, highlighting "someone is either killed, kills themselves or dies in otherwise questionable circumstances - every other day. That - quite frankly - is shocking"

INQUEST gave oral and written evidence to the inquiry and co-ordinated a meeting for bereaved families to meet members of the JCHR so they could express their opinions on the current system and share their experiences. It is particularly significant that the Committee has supported the call for a public inquiry into the death of 16-year-old Joseph Scholes who died in HMYOI Stoke Heath in March 2002.

Deborah Coles, co-director of INQUEST, said: "The report is a damning critique of the failure of the state to protect the right to life of people in custody and highlights the serious flaws in the investigation and inquest system and the treatment of bereaved families. Its wide ranging findings and recommendations are a vindication of the concerns raised by INQUEST and the families with whom we work and give thorough parliamentary scrutiny to an issue that is all too often ignored.

We particularly welcome their unprecedented support for a public inquiry into the death of a child in state custody. To date the government has refused to act on previous recommendations and findings from coroners, inquest juries and other inquiries. Will they respond to the Committee's recommendation or will they too be ignored?"

Yvonne Scholes, mother of Joseph Scholes, said: "I am uplifted by the comments of the Committee which has independently reached the same conclusion as the coroner in finding that there should be a public inquiry into my child Joseph's death. The Home Secretary must find the courage to admit his responsibility for the ongoing death and suffering of children under the present abusive system and must demonstrate moral integrity and reverse his flawed decision to deny us a full public inquiry."

The Committee has also made wide ranging recommendations on the use of control and restraint in all custodial settings and expressed serious concerns about the numbers of women, children and vulnerable people in custody. The report concludes by recommending the establishment of a cross-departmental expert task-force on deaths in custody. INQUEST argued for the setting up of such a body in its evidence.

Further Information

www.inquest.org.uk

To read the report	http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt200405/jtselect/jtrights/15/15.pdf
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Notes to Editors

- INQUEST's co-directors will be available for comment on the report. If you would like to interview a family member, please contact INQUEST directly.
- The verdict in the restraint related death of Giles Freeman is expected tomorrow 14th December. The family were amongst the group of families who attended the meeting arranged by INQUEST and members of the Joint Committee on Human Rights.
- We also expect the government to publish its response to the Bennett Inquiry report imminently. The JCHR has again commented widely on many of the issues raised by this case.

INQUEST

INQUEST is the only non-governmental organisation in England and Wales that works directly with the families of those who die in custody. It provides an independent free legal and advice service to bereaved people on inquest procedures and their rights in the Coroner's Courts.