

For Immediate Release – 12 May 2006

HIGHLY CRITICAL VERDICT RETURNED AT INQUEST INTO YOUNG WOMAN'S DEATH IN LOW NEWTON PRISON

Today the jury returned a highly critical narrative verdict at the conclusion of the three day inquest into the death of 22 year old Rebecca Turner held before HM Coroner Mr. A Tweddle sitting at Chester-le-Street Magistrates' Court.

Rebecca, a mother of two young children, was found hanging in her cell on the Induction Wing at HMP Low Newton on 28 July 2004. She died within two days of arriving at the prison. She spent the vast majority of her time alone in her cell. Rebecca had a history of heroin use and was on a methadone treatment programme at the time of being sentenced.

In their narrative verdict, the jury found that a number of issues relating to Rebecca's arrival and short stay at HMP Low Newton had a negative effect on her already fragile state of mind. They found that Rebecca was dealt with inappropriately in the prison and that this contributed to her death in a significant way, summarised as follows:

- Upon arriving at HMP Low Newton, insufficient action was taken to establish an accurate picture of Rebecca's recent drug intake and an immediate and effective programme of drug detoxification was not begun. The jury specifically noted that despite having no information about Rebecca's methadone treatment programme on the outside, the prison failed to contact the agency with responsibility for this programme. They also found a failure of any significant action having been taken in response to the note received by the Governor of Low Newton from the Director General of Prisons, Phil Wheatley, raising concerns expressed to him by nurses from Low Newton's healthcare unit that the standard of the detoxification offered by prison doctors was very poor and potentially life threatening;
- A decision was made to segregate Rebecca due to threats to her safety from another woman prisoner. The jury found that this decision was not correct. Insufficient consideration was given to the problem of potential risks to Rebecca's safety from other prisoners and Rebecca's own concerns were underestimated;
- Guidance published on suicide prevention strategies and suicide and self harm prevention was not followed.

Rebecca's mother Janet Wade, commented:

I am very pleased with the verdict although saddened that the changes relating to the detoxification regime at the prison did not occur until it was too late for my daughter.

Deborah Coles, co-director of INQUEST said:

Again, an inquest jury has criticised the Prison Service for failing to adequately look after the women in their care. Until they address these failings and are prepared to learn lessons from prior deaths, women entering prison will continue to be unsafe and at risk of losing their lives. This is an ongoing failure across the women's prison estate.

This verdict comes two days after the release of the Prison Inspectorate report into their unannounced full follow-up inspection of HMP and YOI Styal, which identified previously noted systemic failings. Another woman, Valerie Hayes, died in Styal prison on 10 May 2006.

The family was represented at the inquest by INQUEST Lawyers group members Nick Stange from Garden Court North Chambers Manchester, instructed by Fiona Borrill of Lester Morrill Solicitors, Leeds.

Notes to Editors

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.

Further Information	
INQUEST website	www.inquest.org.uk
Deborah Coles, Co-Director	office 020 7263 1111
Gilly Mundy, Senior Caseworker	office 020 7263 1111
Fiona Borrill, Lester Morrill Solicitors	office 0113 245 8549