

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release 26 September 2008

INQUIRY OPENS INTO DEATH OF BERNARD 'SONNY' LODGE IN HMP MANCHESTER

On Monday a public inquiry opens into the self-inflicted death of Bernard 'Sonny' Lodge who died on 28 February 1998 at HMP Manchester. It is expected to last approximately two weeks.

Public hearings start at 10am, 30 September 2008 at the Civil Justice Centre, Manchester M60 9DJ.

Sonny's family have long been calling for an appropriate inquiry into his death. Following his death, the Prison Service set up an internal investigation into the tragedy. This did not involve the family at all and the report was not disclosed to them or published in any form. In 2001 the inquest took place in front of HM Coroner Leonard Gorodkin and a jury. It was highly controversial as the jury were not allowed to return a verdict other than 'killed himself', 'accident' or 'open'. One juror refused to sign the Form of Inquisition which records the verdict and stormed out of court, and several jurors complained to the news media and family that they had been gagged.

Since the inquest, lawyers representing the family have bought judicial review proceedings asserting that the inquest was not conducted in accordance with the requirements of article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights. After a landmark judgment, the family have been awarded this new inquiry.

The family hope this inquiry will examine:

- Evidence of victimisation, bullying and assault by prison officers.
- Evidence of a lack of proper record keeping at two prisons.
- Failure of prison system to provide information as to self-harm risk to key decision-makers.
- Failure of prison doctor to check medical records before allowing deceased to be located alone in a punishment cell.
- Failures to operate existing suicide prevention policies and failures to take heed of clear warning signs from the family and from Sonny himself.

Inquest

The public hearings will examine a number of witnesses. The inquiry is chaired by Barbara Stow, who was formerly an Assistant Prisons and Probation Ombudsman. She will then write a final report which will become a public document.

The Inquiry website is at;

http://www.preventingcustodydeaths.org.uk/default/article_two_investigations/fpdc-bernard_lodge.htm

The family are being represented at the Inquiry by Pete Weatherby (counsel) of Garden Court North Chambers, Manchester, and Robert Lizar, solicitor, Manchester

Further Information	www.inquest.org.uk
Robert Lizar, solicitor	0161 226 2319
INQUEST	020 7263 1111