

## **Family calls for RCMP to probe Ashley Smith prison death**

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The family of a troubled young woman who choked herself to death in prison is calling on the RCMP to launch a criminal investigation into events leading up to her death. Ashley Smith had been transferred between facilities and institutions 17 times in the last 11 months of her life before her death in October 2007.

A hearing in the upcoming coroner's inquest into Smith's death heard arguments today and Monday to broaden the scope of the inquest to all those 11 months, instead of just the time she was in Ontario.

Family lawyer Julian Falconer revealed today the family wrote two letters in mid-October asking the RCMP to investigate the Correctional Service of Canada.

Falconer says the letters specifically ask RCMP Commissioner William Elliott to have the force investigate a Correctional Service management directive for guards not to enter Smith's cell until she stopped breathing.

Three former guards and a supervisor at the Grand Valley Institution for Women in Kitchener, Ont., where Smith died were criminally charged, but those charges were later dropped.

At the inquest hearing Smith's family and advocates argue the transfers and constant segregation are directly linked to the 19-year old's death, which they say was an accident and not a suicide.

Nancy Noble, a lawyer for the correctional service, told the pre-inquest hearing today that her client is taking no position on the motion to extend the scope of the inquest.

There were many allegations made against the correctional service in submissions on Monday, and Noble said they are simply allegations and her client has not yet had an opportunity to respond to them.

A lawyer for the family on Monday told the hearing Smith's treatment and death is a "barbaric" example of how a mentally ill person was mistreated by a corrections system suffering from corruption.

The Moncton, N.B., woman fatally choked herself with a strip of cloth. Video evidence shows staff failed to respond immediately to the emergency.

In September the federal prison ombudsman denounced the practice of locking up mentally ill offenders alone for long periods, saying many of the same structures and policies that failed Smith three years ago remain in pl