



Press Release

CAP Calls for Action After Second Indigenous Inmate Dies of Suicide in Two Weeks

Content note: the following press release addresses the issue of suicide and self-harm. If you are struggling with thoughts of suicide or self-harm, the following crisis lines are available in your region: <https://www.crisisservicescanada.ca/en/looking-for-local-resources-support/> Indigenous crisis supports are available at: <https://www.lifevoice.ca/crisis-supports/indigenous-crisis-supports>

March 25, 2020 (Ottawa, ON) – Indigenous musician Jonathan Wayne Lee Anderson from Edmonton, stage name “Tommy Da”, was taken off life support last Saturday, after fatally injuring himself through hanging while held at the troubled Edmonton Remand Center. This suicide follows closely after the previous suicide of Curtis McKenzie, another indigenous inmate who committed suicide in the Saskatchewan Penitentiary.

While held in remand, he reported multiple injuries sustained from altercations with guards during his detention, including a broken shoulder, a ruptured bicep, torn muscles, broken ribs, a broken hand, and missing teeth as well as difficulty using his arm.

“The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP) has called for strict limits on the use of detention for remand due to overcrowding and dangerous conditions. This is even more urgent during the COVID-19 pandemic” said CAP’s National Chief Robert Bertrand. “The Edmonton Remand Center cannot safely manage the inmates it already has. There is no chance it can manage those inmates and a pandemic behind bars.”

This is not the first report of misconduct at the Edmonton Remand Center. In the 2019 report from the Office of the Correctional investigator, a culture of “impunity and mistreatment at Edmonton Institution”¹ was identified, including:

- 96 per cent of employees reported they had experienced conflict in the workplace. The majority said conflict ruined their working relationship and destroyed trust with staff.
- 17 current employees say they have been sexually assaulted by a co-worker. 65 respondents (23 per cent) reported being sexually harassed by a co-worker.
- 60 per cent have encountered abuse of power within the workplace.
- Over half of respondents said they worked in a “culture of fear.” Most said that fear did not come from interactions with inmates but rather co-workers.
- 51 per cent believe that a “culture of fear” contributes to divisions between work groups (e.g., security vs. programs staff). The majority believe workplace fear allows certain work groups to control the workplace.

– :continued –

- Over 60 per cent of employees had experienced violence in the workplace. Most common forms of workplace violence: threatening behaviour (23 per cent); verbal abuse (22 per cent); verbal intimidation (22 per cent). 11 per cent had witnessed co-worker violence on inmates.
- More than two-thirds of respondents have witnessed harassing behaviour in the workplace.

"Jail cannot be a death sentence – that goes doubly for detainees who have not yet even been convicted of any crime" said CAP Vice-Chief Kim Beaudin. "The correctional investigator has already shown this is a dangerous, dysfunctional institution, yet detainees are still being placed there in the middle of a national health crisis. CAP is in support of the family and friends' call for a public inquiry into the death of Jonathan".

CAP earlier shared a letter with Canada's premiers and attorney generals, calling on them to prioritize the release of low-risk offenders to limit transmission of the virus. CAP further calls on Premiers and Attorney Generals to take steps to improve safety in institutions for offenders who must remain in custody.

-30-

For media interviews please contact:

Jessica Dawson, Executive Assistant

613-747-6022

j.dawson@abo-peoples.org

The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples is the national voice representing the interests of Métis, status and non-status Indians, and Southern Inuit Indigenous People living off-reserve. Today, over 80% of Indigenous people live off-reserve.