



## Allegations of ambush at start of Ashley Smith prison death inquest

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An undated photo of Ashley Smith of Moncton, N.B., a 19-year-old who died in a federal prison after spending five years in the youth criminal justice system.

TORONTO - The lawyer for the family of a young woman who choked herself to death in an Ontario prison is accusing the Correctional Service of Canada of ambushing the inquest into her death with a request to essentially seal all exhibits.

Today is the start of the inquest into the 2007 death of 19-year-old Ashley Smith and on Friday afternoon, Corrections filed a motion to prevent the publication of all exhibits until the lengthy inquest is completed.

Julian Falconer, the lawyer for the Smith family, has been fighting in pre-inquest hearings for months to increase the openness and transparency of the process. He told the coroner's court in Toronto today that he and the other parties were "sandbagged" by this motion.

Smith choked herself with a strip of cloth at the Grand Valley Institution for Women in Kitchener, Ont., and a video of the incident shows staff failed to respond immediately to the emergency.

Falconer and other parties such as the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, want coroner Dr. Bonita Porter to dismiss the motion because they say such an "unprecedented" motion should have been brought with proper notice.

Falconer says it erodes the public function of the inquest, which may start hearing evidence Tuesday.

"The acronym CSC should properly stand for Conceal, Suppress and Contain," he told the inquest. "This isn't a transparent process. This isn't a fair process."

Falconer said the family is fighting for the inquest to be as open as possible so that what happened to their daughter amid secrecy won't happen to another person.

"This is all about (Corrections) hiding what they did to Ashley Smith," he said outside court.

Hundreds of exhibits, including nine hours of video, are expected to be entered as exhibits at the inquest, which by some estimates could take up to a year.

The inquest was originally slated to look at the last 13 weeks of Smith's life, but the family pushed to have it broadened to the whole 11 months she was in federal custody.

During that time - most of which was spent in isolation - she was transferred 17 times between prisons and other facilities across the country, and the constant movement meant the mentally ill woman never got the chance to be properly treated, the family alleges.

Porter agreed in November to broaden the scope, saying evidence wouldn't "necessarily" be restricted by Smith's age, geography, date or institution.

The family was originally heartened by the new scope, but has since met with what they perceive to be more roadblocks to the truth.

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