

## Ashley Smith's family questions coroner's removal

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*Ashley Smith of Moncton, N.B., strangled herself in an Ontario prison in 2007 as guards watched. **The Canadian Press***

The family of Ashley Smith is demanding to know why the coroner presiding over her prison-death inquest [was removed from the case](#) in late June.

On Wednesday, lawyers for the family and the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies demanded a hearing before Ontario's chief coroner, Dr. Andrew McCallum.

They accuse him of a "dangerous precedent" suggesting he replaced the inquest's presiding coroner, Dr. Bonita Porter, last month without any legal authority to do so.

Porter was hit with criticism from both Ontario's Divisional Court and participants at the inquest over her secrecy and the limited scope of the probe into Smith's death.

In May, [Porter was told she was wrong](#) to exclude controversial prison videos of forced injections from the inquest in Toronto.

Smith was 19 when she choked herself to death with a strip of cloth in her cell at the Grand Valley Institution near Kitchener, Ont., in October 2007 as guards looked on. The New Brunswick teen's death came after months of repeated transfers within Canada's adult prison system and an eventual spiral into self-strangulation behaviours.

"Whether one agrees or disagrees with any particular adjudicator, it should be a concern to all of us that an adjudicator is mysteriously replaced by an outside agency," said Julian Falconer, lawyer for the Smith family.

"Far more questions than answers attach to this. And it is dangerous to go forward without clearing the air."

Despite her controversial handling of the case, Porter told the inquest in late June she would deliver three outstanding rulings within days — only to be suddenly replaced with another coroner with a law degree.

A press release from Ontario's chief coroner stated it was due to Porter's pending retirement in November.

On Wednesday, the Smith Family and CAEFS filed formal court documents accusing the chief coroner of interfering with no legal basis, stating the move has left a perception the inquest has "fallen victim to interference from 'on high.'"

The chief coroner's office has not had an opportunity to respond.