



Tsilhqot'in Nation Responds to IIO Report: "The System Fails Another Young Indigenous Man"

The Tsilhqot'in National Government is calling for action today after the Independent Investigations Office (IIO Report) issued its report on the death of a young Tsilhqot'in man in RCMP custody on October 1, 2022. Three years after Surrance Myers died in a holding cell at the Williams Lake RCMP detachment, his family and the Nation are still fighting for answers and accountability.

It is clear from the IIO Report that the RCMP and detachment staff failed Surrance. Surrance was apprehended by RCMP officers for allegedly driving an unlicensed moped, while prohibited from driving a motor vehicle, and detained in a holding cell. He showed no signs of physical injury when he entered the detachment. Drugs and alcohol played no role in his death.

According to the IIO Report, and based on video footage in his cell, Surrance had a medical event at approximately 2:57 am and fell from a resting position on his bunk to the concrete floor without raising his arms to protect his head. Although the Civilian Guard witnessed this fall on her monitor, and went to his cell door in response, she did not call for help or take any action for the almost two hours that followed. Surrance remained motionless on the floor that entire time. When an RCMP officer finally entered the cell to discharge Surrance at 4:48 am, he discovered Surrance in medical distress. Surrance was declared dead soon after.

The IIO Report confirms that the Williams Lake detachment was understaffed that night, that the Civilian Guard was left unsupervised and alone in the detachment, and that the Civilian Guard failed to follow basic protocols for physical checks:

"In this case, [the Civilian Guard] did not meet the standard of care that is required by RCMP policies of a civilian jail guard ... [the Civilian Guard] failed to adhere to RCMP policy with respect to the frequency of physical cell checks, even after she had personally observed [Surrance's] fall onto the concrete floor ...

"Of significant concern is that [the Civilian Guard] did not notice ... that [Surrance] did not appear to move from approximately 2:59 a.m. until 4:48 a.m. ... Previous detection of the AP's medical condition may have provided opportunity for earlier medical intervention".

“[The Civilian Guard] did not meet the standard of care expected of her. Additionally, the supervision of [the Civilian Guard] on the night of the incident was inadequate, and it is reasonable to conclude that this was due, at least in part, to the detachment being understaffed”.

Despite these clear failures, there has been no effort by the RCMP, the provincial or federal government, or the City of Williams Lake to address this tragic loss with the family or the T̓silhqot̓in Nation or explain how steps will be taken to ensure that it does not happen again. As a result, Surrance’s family has had no option but to file a lawsuit in B.C. Supreme Court to seek accountability and change.

With the release of the IIO Report the T̓silhqot̓in Nation continues to mourn the loss of a brother, son, grandson, and friend who was full of life and promise and loved by many.

“It is unacceptable that Indigenous people continue to die in the jail cells of this country. We fear for our loved ones, our young men, our women, when they step out the door. It needs to stop. We need to see change. We are calling on the RCMP and all levels of government to work with us to make the changes that are needed to ensure a tragic loss like this one does not occur again. And if they don’t want to work with us, we will do everything in our power to hold them accountable and change the system ourselves, whatever it takes.”

—Nits’il?in (Chief) Otis Guichon, Sr., Tribal Chief, T̓silhqot̓in National Government

“Surrance was much loved by our community and throughout the Nation. He was a young man, always polite and positive, respectful, working a couple jobs, one of those kids that gives you hope. I knew Surrance very well. I can’t explain what a loss like this does to a family, or to a community. There are no words. It adds loss on top of loss, trauma on top of trauma. I want to see the RCMP take responsibility and own up to this tragedy. Otherwise, nothing has changed, it is just more of the same for us.”

—Nits’il?in Lennon Solomon, Yunešit̓in Government

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