



*Tabled by the reader of
the Third Party - with leave
K. Hawley-George
March 7, 2024*

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
Newfoundland and Labrador

James Dinn, M.H.A.
District of St. John's Centre

23 February 2024

Honourable Paul Pike
Minister
Children, Seniors, and Social Development
PO Box 8700
Confederation Building,
St. John's, NL
A1B 4J6

Dear Minister Pike,

I write to you about a disturbing situation at the morgues of a number of hospitals as a result of gaps in policies that government has failed or seems unwilling to address.

We have learned through family members that the number of unclaimed bodies currently stored in four freezer units outside the Health Sciences Centre has increased since 2019 with no apparent solution for a respectful disposition of the remains. We have heard that one unclaimed body has been stored in a freezer unit for approximately two and a half years. As a result, our office recently filed an access to information request to determine the full extent of the solution. The issue was brought to our attention in 2021, but we were led to believe government was addressing it. Apparently not.

We all recognize the increasing challenges the cost of living over the past five years; families with meagre financial means and lacking adequate government support have been unable to pay for funeral services. As a result, families have been forced to leave the remains of their loved ones in hospital morgues. Hospital morgues reach capacity and bodies must be frozen and placed into storage to prevent further decline/ decomposition. The number of freezer units outside the Health Sciences Centre has grown to four since 2019 to accommodate the growing number of unclaimed bodies.

I have visited the freezer units and have seen recent pictures of numerous bagged unclaimed bodies stored two to a gurney. I have spoken to workers at the hospitals who confirmed the fact that more and more bodies are being stored in the refrigeration units outside the HSC.

There seem to be several reasons for this situation:

- Inadequate government funeral assistance rates for families unable to pay for a funeral.
- An inefficient and complicated application process for low income people not in receipt of income support.
- Significant outstanding unpaid funeral invoices by government to funeral homes.
- Lack of a policy or protocol regarding the respectful disposition of bodies that have remained unclaimed.
- Inability to locate next of kin.

Regardless of the reasons, human remains deserve to be treated and disposed of with dignity. Families also deserve closure and peace of mind. I urge you find an immediate solution to this problem for family members who are waiting for the release of the bodies of their loved ones. I also ask that you commit to work towards long term changes that will prevent this from happening in the future, whether through changes in regulations or legislation.

I would appreciate an opportunity to discuss this issue with you and look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



James Dinn, M.H.A.
St. John's Centre
Leader, NDP

cc. Hon. Tom Osbourne, Minister, Health and Community Services
Hon. John Hogan, Minister, Justice and Public Safety