

JCFJ MEDIA ADVISORY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Avoidable Death of Woman in Dóchas Centre Reveals a Litany of Failures

Yesterday, the Office of the Inspector of Prisons published the investigation report of the death of Ms X, who died on 14th October 2019. The woman died in hospital, after self-harming in the Dóchas Centre 10 days earlier. She had been on remand for an alleged public order offence as she was unable to pay bail of €100.

Many of those interviewed by the Office of the Inspector of Prisons—Ms X’s family law solicitor, social care worker, members of An Garda Síochána, and prison staff—agreed that she should not have been imprisoned as she required treatment and support for mental illness, not a “criminal justice intervention.”

The Inspector’s report highlighted deeply troubling issues with Ms X’s committal to the Dóchas Centre and the Irish Prison Service’s engagement with the Office’s investigation under the Prison Act 2007. Conflicting accounts by members of An Garda Síochána and prison staff, over whether Ms X articulated an intention to kill herself, were found by the Inspector and the report revealed that Night Duty Journals were not provided by the Irish Prison Service upon request.

Accurate record keeping and the availability of those records to investigators is vital to find out the truth of what has happened to a person who has died in custody. The disappearance of records and/or a failure to make them available for inspection is unacceptable. To underline the seriousness of this issue, the report recommended that in future, prison governors should seize and securely store all journals immediately after a death in custody occurs.

Death in custody investigations often reveal the sharp points of operational failures and institutional blind spots. This report reveals a broken internal complaints system which is not satisfying its basic requirements under the Prison Rules. Considering the management of a complaint submitted by Ms X’s Family Law Solicitor, the Inspector concludes that there are “serious deficiencies in the current process.” An example of this is that the investigator was initially given a timeline of three months, but two years later the Office of the Inspector of Prisons was informed that the complaint was outside of the scope of prison rules. No reasons for the decision have been given.

This tragic death should be a watershed moment for female imprisonment in Ireland and a catalyst for change. Women like Ms X need mental health services, not imprisonment. This young woman was imprisoned because she could not afford to pay a small sum of money for bail. She ultimately ended up paying with her life.

Keith Adams, Penal Policy Advocate at the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice says: “The death of Ms X is a profoundly sad and distressing story. Safe and humane custody is the bare minimum requirement of any criminal justice system. But her death in our prison system raises many fundamental questions about how we imprison women in Ireland and the type of women we choose to imprison. Many women with severe mental ill-health are imprisoned in overcrowded female prisons, and here we see the lethal consequence of this practice.”

ENDS

Links:

[Death in Custody Investigation Report and Action Plan relating to the death of Ms X 2019](#)

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About the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice

The Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice is an agency of the Irish Jesuit Province, dedicated to undertaking social analysis and theological reflection in relation to issues of social justice, including housing and homelessness, penal policy, environmental justice, and economic ethics. Established in 1978 by a small group of Jesuits living and working in Ballymun, on the northside of Dublin city, the Centre was intended to promote social justice and critically examine issues of structural injustice and poverty.