

Office of the Deputy Solicitor General
Community Safety

Bureau du sous-solliciteur général
Sécurité communautaire

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133-2021-38
By email

April 15, 2021

Taras Natyshak, MPP
Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts
Legislative Assembly of Ontario
c/o comm-publicaccounts@ola.org

Dear MPP Natyshak:

I am writing in follow up to the letter received from Christopher Tyrell, Clerk of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, addressed to Dr. Dirk Huyer, Chief Coroner for Ontario, dated March 1, 2021, regarding Standing Committee on Public Accounts' ("Committee") request for the information copied below.

"As per the Committee's established practice, I am writing to request the Ministry's response to the Value-for-Money Audit of Bereavement Authority of Ontario of the 2020 Annual Report of the Auditor General. The Committee is interested in an update on your Ministry's action plans and timetable for addressing the Auditor's concerns."

It is my understanding that on March 9, 2021, the Office of the Ontario Chief Coroner, under advisement of the Office of the Auditor General, contacted the Clerk of the Committee to request the specific template that could be used to address the ministry's action plans and timetable for addressing the Auditor's concerns. On same day, the status table template was provided to the Office of the Chief Coroner. Please find enclosed the completed status table outlining the Ministry of the Solicitor General's actions plans and timetable for addressing the Auditor's concerns.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Taras Natyshak, MPP
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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M Di Tommaso". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "M" being a large, stylized letter.

Mario Di Tommaso, O.O.M.
Deputy Solicitor General, Community Safety
Commissioner of Emergency Management
Ministry of the Solicitor General

Enclosures (2)

c: Bonnie Lysyk, Auditor General of Ontario

Christopher Tyrell, Committee Clerk, Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Dr. Dirk Huyer, Chief Coroner for Ontario

**Summary Status Table in Response to the
Report of the Auditor General of Ontario**
Value for Money Audit: Bereavement Authority of Ontario
[Section #, 2020 Annual Report of the Auditor General]
Ministry of the Attorney General

Auditor's Recommendation	Completed undertaking	Outstanding undertaking (including timeline)
Recommendation 12: To effectively address any large-scale death event such as a natural disaster or non-natural event, we recommend that the Office of the Chief Coroner, working with the Bereavement Authority of Ontario (Bereavement Authority), revisit the Provincial Mass Fatality Plan and incorporate any key information, inputs and lessons learned from the provincial response to the COVID-19 pandemic by the Bereavement Authority.	During the pandemic, the OCC and the Bereavement Authority of Ontario (BAO) partnered to quickly develop and deploy the Expedited Death Response Plan to manage the surge in deaths. The partnership provided the opportunity for each organization to understand and appreciate the capabilities of both in critical times. This partnership enables coordination, support and creation of effective processes and systems Additionally, the OCC invited the BAO to provide input into the Provincial Mass Fatality Plan. The most recent version of the plan identifies the BAO as a resource for the deployment of death care services in a mass fatality situation. Shared experiences learned during the COVID-19 pandemic was valuable in illustrating the benefits of the working relationship between OCC and BAO during a mass fatality situation. And more importantly, ensures systems are in place to address any concerns that might come up in future mass fatalities across our province.	The OCC/OFPS worked directly with the BAO to ensure their work is incorporated in the Provincial Mass Fatality Plan. We will ensure that this collaborative approach continues and should updates become necessary following further lessons learned from the active pandemic these will be integrated into the plan accordingly. Contingency planning that leverages a collaborative approach puts the needs of families first during any large-scale death event or natural disaster.

As of April 15, 2021

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Auditor's Recommendation	Completed undertaking	Outstanding undertaking (including timeline)
Recommendation #14: To provide better value to family members when their loved one has passed, we recommend that the Ministry of the Solicitor General, together with the Office of the Chief Coroner: Analyze the information captured by the Office of the Chief Coroner about coroner cremation certificates, such as the number of requests made, work performed by coroners and the result of work completed.	The Office of the Chief Coroner (OCC) conducted a review of data on cremation certificates approved since 2017 when the OCC initiated its on-line system. While the analysis was prompted by two coroners that were identified by the Auditor General who earned approximately \$165K in 2019 approving cremation certificates, the review examined data that included 568 coroners who signed certificates from 2017 throughout 2020. A report was provided to the Deputy Solicitor General February 26, 2021. This report was shared with the Bereavement Authority of Ontario (BAO). Completion of the report conveys a staunch commitment to transparency and protecting taxpayers.	The OCC is developing a surveillance mechanism to capture and audit all aspects of cremation certificate data (e.g., number of requests made, distribution of certificates, amount of time spent investigating and approving, the number of requests denied and the number of deaths requiring further investigation). While the OCC can obtain much of this data from the SharePoint System, there is currently no analysis approach e.g. a way to alert the OCC of inequalities in distribution. Implementing such a mechanism provides the type of governance and systems to deliver the highest value to Ontario families. Estimated timeframe for completion: Fall 2021

As of April 15, 2021

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Develop a process whereby certificates for cremation are issued more equally and proportionately by Ontario's coroners; and	The OCC has shared the cremation certificate analysis report with the Bereavement Authority of Ontario (BAO). The OCC also met with the BAO to discuss what appears to be preferential referrals from some funeral homes to certain coroners leading to an unequal distribution of cremation certificate assignments and subsequent financial compensation. The OCC is augmenting coroner performance management by all Regional Supervising Coroners (RSCs). The Deputy Chief Coroner has communicated to all RSCs that consistent regional monitoring of cremation certificate work across all 10 regions in Ontario is mandatory. Monitoring compliance of the work across all our regions should support the implementation of an effective system to better govern the allocation of cremation certificates equitably.	The OCC is working with the Bereavement Authority of Ontario and Service Ontario to develop a process whereby cremation certificates can be issued more equally and proportionately by Ontario coroners. This may include revising the current approach of selecting local coroners to a regionalized approach where the funeral homes will select from a regional rotating list. The equitable distribution of cremation certificates will be a component of a revised Service Delivery Model for the Death Investigation System. A thorough system where tracking and compliance can be governed effectively. Estimated timeframe for completion: March 2022

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Auditor's Recommendation	Completed undertaking	Outstanding undertaking (including timeline)
Eliminate the \$75 fee for coroner cremation certificates to align Ontario with the other jurisdictions that do not charge for them.	This recommendation was not accepted – coroners need to be remunerated for this work and are now paid on a fee-for-service basis. As part of developing the service delivery model, all remuneration options (i.e. salary vs. fee for service/per diem) are being explored. This may result in the fee being absorbed in the salary/payment model. That may mean that a fee is not issued. A jurisdictional scan has been completed and the analysis will help inform future options. The scan indicates that fees are inconsistently applied across the country – some jurisdictions apply a cremation certificate fee and others do not. Likewise, the payment of death investigators across the county varies – some jurisdictions have the fee-for-service model like Ontario and others are salaried positions.	A new approach regarding cremation certificates is being explored in developing the model for death investigations work in Ontario. This will include a full analysis of the cremation data and value for money. Estimated timeframe for completion: March 2022

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