

Ahmo family calls for transparency, accountability and justice following death of William Ahmo in custody of Headingly Correctional Institution

Treaty 1 Territory – On February 14th 2021 shortly after 11pm, our son, brother and father, William Walter Ahmo (known to all as “Will”) passed away at Health Sciences Centre. He should not have been there in the first place.

The circumstances of Will being taken to hospital are suspicious, and we have heard disturbing reports about the behaviour of Correctional Officers prior to his death. Will told us that the Correctional Officers treated him and other inmates as less than human, that they did not wear personal protective equipment (like masks) to protect inmates from COVID-19, and that he was concerned that something might happen to him.

Something did happen to him, and now Will has been taken from us.

Our story is all too common. Will should not have been in jail and should not have been made a victim of Canada’s racist justice system.

We will fight to make sure the truth comes out, we will fight to ensure that the guards who did this to Will, and the ones who failed to protect him, are held accountable for their actions and inactions, and we will fight to make sure that no other family has to go through what we are now going through.

We call on the Chief Medical Examiner of Manitoba to call an inquest into Will’s death, under section 19(5) of *The Fatality Inquiries Act*.

We also demand that a truly independent investigation into Will’s death be conducted. Not by the Winnipeg Police, the RCMP or the IIU, all of whom have shown that they cannot be trusted to ensure that justice is done.

Will Ahmo was the father of Emory, the son of Darlene, and the brother of Dara and Josh. He was a member of Sagkeeng First Nation. The Ahmo family would like to thank the many community members who have reached out to express their sympathy and support, and would particularly like to thank Chief Derrick Henderson and the Government of Sagkeeng First Nation for their support.

Will’s family asks that media respects their privacy in this difficult time while they grieve. Information about opportunities for interviews and a press conference will be provided at a later date.

Statements from Will's Family

Statement from Darlene Ahmo, Will's mother:

“My heart aches for my son Will.

I am going to miss his big smile when he would come in and visit, say ‘Hi Mama, my little mom.’ My son had good in him he loved his son and he didn’t deserve to die this way. Just sitting beside my son watching a movie together and having quiet time together. I will miss that so much. I loved my son with my whole heart.”

Statement from Emory Ahmo, Will's son:

“William Walter Ahmo was truly a compassionate and loving father. A protector during dark times for his family. Despite his demons, and situations he endured my Dad always made an effort to love me, his son. He would always ask how my life was going, and would let me know he loved me every time we talked. He truly loved his family to the core, his faith kept him strong with love and hope. He only wished to see our family together around the dinner table, united as we should be. He prayed for us to find happiness and peace within this world.

Despite the prejudice and racism he experienced from Canada's Law Enforcement/ Corrections Personnel and people in his daily interactions he still found beauty and had faith in Creator till his last breath. I will miss my dad greatly, I only hope and pray that Canada and the Law will deliver justice to those who are responsible for his passing. Time and time again Indigenous peoples are shown to be a minority within minorities; justice is not seen and we are forgotten. Please deliver justice for my Dad.”

Statement from Dara Ahmo, Will's sister:

“My hope is that this never happens to anyone again in any institution, nobody deserves this kind of treatment. Please demand justice for my brother, our people! We can't allow this to be hidden underneath the covers this time. These inmates are no less human than we are and deserve to be treated with dignity. This has got to change in this country. The people in power need to be held accountable for their actions.

My brother had a lot of good and love in him, he did not deserve this. In the end the Creator is the only one who can judge us. We need answers and deserve to know the truth, justice needs to prevail! Indigenous lives matter!”