

MPs SUPPORT CAMPAIGN FOR PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO DEATH OF 16-YEAR-OLD JOSEPH SCHOLES IN PRISON

5TH JULY 2004

INQUEST has been working with Joseph's mother Yvonne Scholes and Chris Ruane MP to lobby support for an Early Day Motion tabled on June 30th. 27 MPs have so far supported the call for a public inquiry into the death of 16-year-old Joseph Scholes.

The motion comes after the call for a public inquiry by INQUEST and Nacro last November in the House of Commons, which received huge support from children's groups, Lords and Baronesses and MPs.

Joseph Scholes was a 16-year-old boy who hung himself in Stoke Heath Young Offenders Institution on 24th March 2002 just nine days into a two year sentence. The inquest verdict was 'accidental death in part contributed to because the risk was not properly recognised and appropriate precautions were not taken to prevent it'. In an unprecedented move the coroner announced that he would be writing to the Home Secretary to say that a public inquiry should be set up in light of the issues that had arisen at the inquest.

Deborah Coles co director of INQUEST said:

"We would urge all MPs to sign this very important EDM. A public inquiry is the only way we can be sure that the many issues concerning Joseph's death are addressed and that the lessons concerning the treatment of children in the criminal justice system can be learnt. A failure to grant this inquiry will question this government's commitment to human rights"

Yvonne Scholes, mother of Joseph Scholes said:

"At a meeting with Paul Goggins in December 2003 I was assured that a public inquiry had not been ruled out. Since then another child has died while in the supposed care of the state. An inquest has now been held into Joseph's death and the coroner for Shropshire stated that an organised and comprehensive review of pre sentence exercise, allocation process and availability and provision of local authority secure children's homes be considered and that the review should take the form of a public inquiry. The Home Office is wilfully ignoring the call of myself, INQUEST and Nacro, members of both houses and the Shropshire coroner, to hold a public inquiry and in doing so is breaching my right to a full independent investigation into the death of my child. This is adding to the terrible distress suffered by Joseph's brother and sisters and myself following the state's failure to protect Joseph's life."

Note to Editors
The Early Day Motion

EDM 1423
JOSEPH SCHOLES 30.06.04
Ruane/Chris

That this House notes that Joseph Scholes was a 16 year old boy who hanged himself in Stoke Heath Young Offenders Institution on 24th March 2002 just nine days into a two year sentence; further notes despite being recognised by all concerned as a deeply disturbed child he was allocated to Prison Service accommodation without the standards of care

n q u e s t

needed for such a vulnerable child; further notes that the number of children sent to prison has doubled in the last 10 years, with increasingly younger children being given custody, and that concern has been expressed by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Joint Committee on Human Rights on the practice of sentencing children to custody; further notes that, since 1990, 25 children have taken their own lives in prisons and that Yvonne Scholes, Joseph's mother has, together with INQUEST and Nacro and supported by key penal and children's rights organisations and charities as well as honourable Members and Members of the House of Lords, called for a public inquiry; further notes that the Coroner, as part of his public duty to prevent the recurrence of fatalities, reported to the Home Secretary following the inquest into Joseph's death that there should be a public inquiry; and therefore calls upon the Government to set up a comprehensive public inquiry to deal with the many issues concerning Joseph's death so that lessons can be learnt about the treatment of children in the criminal justice system.