

STATEMENT OF ROBERT SINCLAIR

June 15, 2009

Last September, my cousin and boyhood friend, Brian Sinclair, was ignored to death.

He was killed because for 34 hours, nobody bothered to help him while he waited for care in a hospital emergency department. He somehow became invisible.

I am humbled to be speaking on behalf of my cousin and family today.

I was also honoured to speak at Brian's funeral. I spoke from my heart. I said then that: "I hope that Brian's death is not in vain... and that he will leave something behind that prevents this from happening again."

It looked like those hopes might be fulfilled when the Chief Medical Examiner investigated the tragedy, brought out some truth, and ordered a broad Inquest.

But just last week, the Government of Manitoba shut the door on our family's hopes. The Government said that if we wanted to participate in this inquest, to look for answers to the important questions we have, and to try to make changes happen so that Brian Sinclair's death is not in vain, we would have to accept inferior and discriminatory treatment.

The Government said it will not cover our full legal fees – even though it will cover **all** of the legal costs of the hospital that killed Brian Sinclair.

The Government said there will be a \$40,000 cap on our legal representation, even if the inquest goes on for months and costs a lot of money, like they sometimes do. When the money runs out we will be left outside our own relative's inquest, while the hospital that killed my cousin gets unlimited first-class treatment all the way.

This is about discrimination, plain and simple. This is not acceptable. We can't go into an inquest where we, the victim's family, are being treated in an inferior way. Brian Sinclair was killed by inferior treatment. It is discrimination against all victims, native and non-native.

Judge Murray Sinclair said a few years ago that victims' families are entitled to full and equitable funding in inquests because their role is essential. We asked the Government of Manitoba for nothing more. What we got instead is a PR move that seems calculated to make the Government look generous by being a bit less discriminatory than usual, while still marginalizing our family's role in getting the truth out.

It wasn't bad enough that Brian Sinclair got discarded by the hospital and by the Government. Now they want to marginalize his family as well. What are they afraid of? That we might ask some tough questions? That we might try to get the truth about why Brian Sinclair was ignored for 34 hours?

Brian lived on the street. He lost his legs after they froze in a snowbank. He was sick a lot. He was native. All these things contributed to Brian Sinclair being discriminated against during his life, and we believe they contributed to Brian being ignored until he died.

Our family has a direct interest in having a fair and equitable seat inside the inquest. We won't see a penny of any government money that may be provided to pay for legal bills and expenses. Our interest is to make things better for people like my cousins, and Brian's brothers, Russell and Bradley. They have a lot of the same strikes against them that Brian did. We don't want them or anyone else to be marginalized, discriminated against, and ignored the way Brian was.

Right now the H1N1 crisis among native people is dominating the media. This H1N1 issue is actually connected to the treatment of Brian Sinclair. The living conditions among native people in Winnipeg and elsewhere are part of the inferior treatment we are talking about, and part of the reason epidemics take hold among our people. Inferior treatment affects native people daily. But that is not where inferior treatment will end. In the end it will affect everyone.

As the famous poet John Donne once wrote, "No man is an island, entire of itself. Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. Therefore never ask to know for whom the bells tolls. It tolls for you."

Ekosani. Miigwetch.