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Inquest Into Death and Shelter for Homeless People

Mr. Forbes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we asked this government last week for an inquest into the death of Jerry Peequaquat. Jerry was 42 years old. His family says he was cut off social assistance despite being desperate and homeless. And Jerry died in a makeshift shelter on the 500 block of Avenue K South in Saskatoon.

The Social Services minister said last week it was too early to commit to an inquest. So my question is to the minister: is this government ready now to call that inquest and will it be taking any action as a result of Jerry's tragic death?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister for Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the normal process is the coroner would call an inquest. The coroner has not yet determined a cause of death. There is still some test results that he is waiting for, so we will be waiting for those results and the determination from the coroner.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, last week we also asked the minister for an estimate of how many others are desperate and homeless but not even receiving social assistance. She didn't have an answer then. Does she have an answer today?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Ms. Harpauer: Mr. Speaker, as we've said before, there is a cold weather strategy that is in place, so our communities work together. They are in constant communication so that if anyone identifies a homeless person through our cold weather months, that they should be reporting it to the CBOs [community-based organization] that has emergency shelters.

We've doubled the number of emergency shelters here in the province, Mr. Speaker, and we encourage all of those in the community — family members, or anyone, even if it's a stranger — if you see someone on the street that is in the cold in our weather months, please call the emergency numbers and there will be shelter provided.