



### VERDICT AT CORONERS INQUEST

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS AS A RESULT OF THE CORONER'S INQUEST PURSUANT TO SECTION 38 OF THE CORONERS ACT, [SBC 2007] C 15, INTO THE DEATH OF

**Garlow**

SURNAME

**Mary Ann**

GIVEN NAMES

An Inquest was held at The Burnaby Coroners Court, in the municipality of Burnaby

in the Province of British Columbia, on the following dates: January 22 to February 5, 2024

before: John Knox, Presiding Coroner.

into the death of Garlow Mary Ann 63  Male  Female  
(Last Name) (First Name) (Middle Name) (Age)

The following findings were made:

Date and Time of Death: April 11, 2022 AM hours  
(Date) (time)

Place of Death: 203 Abbott Street Vancouver, B.C.  
(Location) (Municipality/Province)

Medical Cause of Death:

(1) Immediate Cause of Death: a) Thermal injuries and smoke inhalation

Due to or as a consequence of

Antecedent Cause if any: b) Residential fire

Due to or as a consequence of

Giving rise to the immediate cause (a) above, stating underlying cause last. c)

(2) Other Significant Conditions Contributing to Death:

Classification of Death:  Accidental  Homicide  Natural  Suicide  Undetermined

The above verdict certified by the Jury on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of February AD, 2024

John Knox

Presiding Coroner's Printed Name

[Signature]  
Presiding Coroner's Signature



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*Pursuant to Section 38 of the Coroners Act, the following recommendations are forwarded to the Chief Coroner of the Province of British Columbia for distribution to the appropriate agency:*

### JURY RECOMMENDATIONS:

**To: BC Housing**

1. Work with owners and operators of all BC Housing-funded Single Room Occupancy (SRO) buildings so that lease agreements hold the operator to a higher standard for fire safety above the minimum *Fire Code* requirements, including implementation of the following:
  - (a) Upgrade smoke detectors with adjustability for sensitivity in all SRO rooms and common areas.
  - (b) Provide Funding to SRO operators to install and maintain tamper proofing for all fire safety equipment such as cages over smoke detectors and tamper-proof fire door alarms.
  - (c) As an additional fire safety resource, an inventory of back-up fire extinguishers to be kept aside in a separate location at a ratio of one back up extinguisher for every two extinguishers required by the *Fire Code* for the building and used to replenish floor supply until they can be serviced and put back onto the floor.
  - (d) Ensure that the Fire Safety Plan for each building includes individual evacuation plans for tenants with disabilities written in consultation with each affected tenant, including consideration of a buddy system.
  - (e) Provide comprehensive training to staff and tenants on the priority of steps that must be taken in the event of emergency.
2. Implement the following:
  - (a) Perform building inspections on all properties before being cleared for occupancy and assess to determine suitability of occupancy for individual tenants.
  - (b) Coordinate assessments of tenants with SRO operators to determine individual specific needs and accommodate them in an appropriate building.
  - (c) Maintain an inventory of SROs including individual amenities and barriers such as stairs and no strobe lights.





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- (d) Housing in SROs should be provided with primary focus on the complex needs of the people being served by BC Housing and SRO operators. Housing for persons with complex needs must be done thoughtfully and with a primary goal of placing the person in the most suitable housing for their individual needs. A tiered system of accommodation should be in place to allow for services to be directed more centrally to those in the most need. Clients with simpler needs for housing can be placed in buildings allowing for more independence, if appropriate.
- (e) Housing for SROs should be purpose built or selected. Persons with complex needs should be housed in buildings that meet modern building safety codes and standards.
- (f) Full-time mental health supports should be in place for these buildings. For example, one mental health support person and an additional support person.
3. Study the feasibility of upgrading SROs to modern building safety codes or replacing them with buildings that meet these standards.
  4. Phase out or eliminate BC Housing-funded SROs being operated in privately owned buildings.
  5. Include requirements in future operating agreements with SRO operators for a Fire Watch to be supplemented by extra staff or a qualified third-party provider such as a Fire Warden position or qualified third-party Fire Watch provider.
  6. Create a mechanism for tenant complaints with a dedicated phone line and online contact point staffed by a Tenant Ombudsperson who will receive, investigate, and follow up on tenant concerns and issues. Provide tenants with pamphlets or posters explaining how to access the Tenant Ombudsperson.
  7. Lease agreements with SRO operators should include a requirement for the operator to have a resource team available 24/7 to be called out during critical incidents to provide additional staffing and support to front line staff and managers.
  8. Require SRO operators to maintain up to date tenant lists. These should be stored on site and the same information should be immediately and remotely accessible for the benefit of emergency responders.
  9. Make funding available to SRO operators to use at their discretion in the case of an extreme building safety issue to allow for prompt return to operational status, such as for necessary elevator repairs, larger fire panel repairs or replacements.

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10. Add a requirement to the operating agreements that SRO staff members conduct monthly formal inspections to check for working smoke detectors.
11. Provide that all SRO lobbies and common areas must have tamper-proof bulletin boards to provide safety and other related information.

### **To: Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General**

12. Bring the *Fire Safety Act* of 2016 into force without delay to provide fire services with tools for additional enforcement.
13. Encourage the use of city bylaws to increase enforcement and compliance, and to improve fire prevention and fire safety.
  - (a) Encourage municipalities to update bylaws, where possible, to allow for more robust enforcement, including options for escalating fines and prosecution for building owners who do not comply with fire notices and orders.
  - (b) Encourage municipalities to make Fire Watch orders enforceable with significant penalties if not immediately enacted.
14. Consider legislative or other changes to fully fund all assistive devices to eliminate any barriers to safety for residents of SROs with mobility or hearing disabilities. If implemented by legislation, consider naming it in honour of Mr. Dennis Guay.
15. Work with municipalities to consider making it mandatory for fire supply companies to report needed repairs identified on annual Fire Systems Inspections of SRO buildings to the relevant local fire department.

### **To: City of Vancouver and Vancouver Fire Rescue Services (VFRS)**

16. Create a database which lists all SROs, city shelters and transition houses to include a history of municipal bylaw violations, fire watch orders, and occupants with disabilities.
17. Provide copies of all Fire Watch Orders, Notices of Violations and Municipal Ticket Infractions, and annual fire inspection reports to the SRO operator and building owner.
18. Expand hours and staffing of the VFRS Urban Compliance Team to seven days a week.
19. Collaborate and coordinate fire and building inspections so that they alternate every six months.





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**To: City of Vancouver and Vancouver Coastal Health**

- 20. Create a 24/7 mobile call-out team to support VFRS Fire Hall #2 personnel responding to critical incidents. This team should include staff capable of responding to the complex needs of SRO tenants, such as social workers, psychiatric nurses, and mental health support workers, who could advise BC Housing and the SRO operator regarding the high-risk actions of particular tenants.
- 21. Expand the scope of the Hoarding Action Response Team to include a team dedicated to all SROs in the Downtown Eastside.
- 22. Expand the Downtown Eastside SRO Collaborative Pilot Project for tenant fire safety training to include all SROs in the Downtown Eastside.

**To: Minister of Housing**

- 23. Establish an annual conference including staff from the Ministry of Housing, BC Housing, and all stakeholders in the Downtown Eastside to exchange information and establish best practices for fire safety and critical incident prevention and response.
- 24. Create a combined task force or working group to include the City of Vancouver, other municipalities, and regional districts to identify land that could be developed for social housing, shelters, and transitional housing.

**To: Vancouver Police Department**

- 25. Work with SRO operators to develop mutual best practices for missing persons incidents so that tenants are considered missing until they are located, or their safety is confirmed by a reliable witness who has direct knowledge of that individual.