October 22, 2015

To: Spokane Board of County Commissioners
Spokane Regional Law and Justice Council
Dr. Jacqueline van Wormer, Acting Criminal Justice Administrator

CC: Human Rights Commission

Dear Commissioners and Council members,

Smart Justice Spokane is very saddened and concerned about the five deaths of Peter O'Brien, John Everitt, Lorenzo Haynes, Scott Stevens, and Tammy Sue Hienen that occurred in the Spokane County Jail (or while in the custody of the jail) this year. We believe that the jail should be a place where everyone is safe and receives appropriate health care, including a health assessment at booking.

We understand that the Spokane Human Rights Commission has requested a Department of Justice investigation. Commissioner Mielke also advised the Spokane Regional Law and Justice Council that Spokane County would be receiving technical assistance from the National Institute of Corrections (NIC). Since little if any information has been shared publicly, we are writing to express our continued concern.

We suggest that the County request the technical assistance to review the policies, procedures, and practices related to safety and the delivery of health care in the jail so that injuries and deaths can be prevented. In addition to this more general assessment, Smart Justice Spokane also supports a thorough and independent outside investigation to determine the facts surrounding the deaths and to assess what could have been done differently to prevent the loss of these five lives.

We ask that both the process of the NIC assessment and the investigation be transparent and that the results and recommendations of both be disclosed to the public. The public needs a clear understanding of what happened, how safety and the provision of health care could be improved and how such deaths may be avoided. We also request that Spokane County and the Spokane Regional Law and Justice Council respond to the findings, advise the community of its plan to make the jail safer, and describe how the efforts will be evaluated.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Smart Justice Spokane Executive Committee

The Smart Justice Spokane campaign coalition: ACLU/Washington · All Saints Lutheran Church · Center for Justice · Chihak & Associates - Disability Attorneys · Community Building Foundation · Community-Minded Enterprises · Don't Shoot, Inc. · Friends of Compassion · Fulcrum Institute Dispute Resolution Clinic · Greater Spokane Progress / Win/Win Network · I Did the Time. · KYRS/Thin Air Community Radio · League of Women Voters Spokane Area · NAMI Spokane - National Alliance on Mental Illness · Neighborhood Alliance of Spokane · Northwest Fair Housing Alliance · November Coalition ·Odyssey World International Education Services · Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane · SEIU Heathcare 775 NW · Smith-Barbieri Progressive Fund · Spokane Branch Unit 1137 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People · Spokane Center for Responsible Living · Spokane Humanist Focus · Spokane Tribe of Indians ·Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane · University Legal Assistance, Gonzaga Law School · Washington Community Action Network · Washington Education Association, Eastern Washington · Washington Normal · Washington State Council of City & County Employees - Local 270 AFSCME

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