Dear Cynthia,

Next week is going to be an important one for people living with, or affected by, mental illness. The coroner’s inquest into the shooting death of Tony Du begins on Monday; and Pivot will be there from beginning to end, alongside lawyer Frances Mahon, to support Tony’s family and fight for policing policies and practices that will reduce the risk of injury or death to individuals experiencing a mental health event.

People living with mental illness are exceptionally vulnerable to police violence. Tony Du, described by friends and family as loving, kind, with a generous spirit, was one such individual. On November 22, 2014, he was walking near the intersection of Knight Street and 41st Avenue when he was shot and killed by a Vancouver police officer. The fatal shots were fired “within minutes” of police arriving on scene according to a witness. For more than a decade, Pivot has argued that police lack the training to deal effectively and safely with people in mental health distress; and we believe this was a key factor in the events that led to Tony Du’s tragic death.

We have seen this pattern of violence before: police unable to de-escalate situations involving people living with mental illness, and members of the public left seriously injured or dead in the aftermath. That is why we, along with Tony’s family and lawyer Frances Mahon, will be there to fight for meaningful change. In the words of Tony Du’s supporters “disability must not be a death sentence.” As part of the inquest, Pivot is making the following recommendations:

- Implementation of the **Memphis Model Crisis Intervention Team** program for the Vancouver Police Department (VPD). This consists of 40 hours of training for 20% of general duty officers who are selected, trained, and designated as Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) officers. These officers wear special identification, and there would be at least one on duty in each district every shift. They would be prioritized as first responders during suspected mental health-related calls, and would be selected for appropriate characteristics, abilities, and backgrounds.

- **Training** for 911 call takers and dispatch personnel to recognize signs of mental health distress and engage specific protocols appropriate for those circumstances.

- VPD use of unmarked cars to calls involving incidents of mental health distress.

- Whenever possible, use of shields as opposed to guns and tasers in calls involving incidents of mental health distress.

- Proactive promotion of an **overall culture shift**, from authoritative to calm and de-escalating, with respect to how police officers engage members of the public living with mental illness.
A family’s life has been turned upside down because of the actions of the Vancouver Police Department. They will never get Tony back, but they deserve accountability and policy reform that will ensure this will never happen again. The injustices and suffering that have befallen them must not befall another family, and the recommendations coming out of this inquest will help ensure that.

Join us as we stand with the family of Tony Du and fight for justice. We'll be at the inquest every day providing real-time updates, and you can follow developments through the hashtags #Justice4Tony and #TonyDu on social media.

Raise your voice and demand that the Vancouver Police Department face justice, because "disability should not be a death sentence."

In strength and solidarity,
Katrina Pacey, Executive Director

http://www.pivotlegal.org/

Participating in a coroner's inquest is an important action for Pivot to take because it can lead to recommendations that create systemic change through law reform and increased police accountability. As a small grassroots organization, we need the help of our community to be able to take action. Make a gift today to Pivot and help us fight for accountability and justice for everyone in our community.