

## **Small Group Session**

## **Séance en petit groupe**

### **Commissioners / Commissaires**

The Honourable / L'honorable J. Michael MacDonald,  
Chair / Président

Leanne J. Fitch (Ret. Police Chief, M.O.M)

Dr. Kim Stanton

Audio file(s): 20220831\_SGS\_Mendiuk C\_AUD\_MP3

**Held at:**

Virtual

Wednesday, August 31, 2022

**Tenue à:**

Virtual

Mercredi, le 31 août 2022

INTERNATIONAL REPORTING INC.

[www.irri.net](http://www.irri.net)  
(800)899-0006

## II Appearances / Comparutions

Ms. Crystal Mendiuk	Sister of Jolene Oliver, Aunt of Emily Tuck and Sister-in-law of Aaron Tuck
Mr. John Oliver	Father of Jolene Oliver, Grandfather of Emily Tuck and Father-in-Law of Aaron Tuck
Ms. Bonnie Oliver	Mother of Jolene Oliver, Grandmother of Emily Tuck and Mother-in-Law of Aaron Tuck
Ms. Linda Hupman	Counsel
Mr. Leo Artalejo	Facilitator
Ms. Maureen Wheller	Commission Counsel
Ms. Gillian Hnatiw	Commission Counsel
Ms. Mary Pyche	Mental Health Director

### III

## Table of Content / Table des matières

	<b>PAGE</b>
Small Group Session with Ms. Crystal Mendiuk	1

Truro, Nova Scotia

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28

--- Upon commencing on Wednesday, August 31, 2022 at 5:00 p.m.

**MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** Good morning or good afternoon.

**MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Good afternoon. Leo here with the Mass Casualty Commission. The Zoom meeting isn't letting people in to the meeting room so it will take just a second.

**MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** Yep.

**MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Alright, so, can you hear me okay, Crystal?

**MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** I can.

**MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Okay, great. I believe there is Linda Hupman. Let me add her to the meeting here.

And I see that your parents are on. Hi Bonnie, welcome.

Welcome, Ms. Hupman. Thank you for joining us.

**MS. LINDA HUPMAN:** Glad to be here, Leo.

**MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** So, according to my notes this is everyone we are expecting tonight. Crystal, is that your understanding as well?

**MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** Yep.

**MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Okay, great. What I thought I'd would do is introduce the people that are on the call from the Commission side and then just happy to let you introduce yourself and any of your family members that would to be introduced as well. So, we are really grateful for your time today. My name is Leo Artalejo. I am on the engagement team for the Commission and I will be facilitating this meeting.

I would also like to welcome the three Commissioners of the Mass Casualty Commission. We have Commissioner Stanton, Commissioner MacDonald and Commissioner Fitch, all of whom are here to hear from and learn from the family. We have Maureen Wheller who is the Community Liaison that-- our engagement with family members directly. She has been working with the families since the very

1 beginning and then we have Gillian who is the Commission counsel also here as well.  
2 So, I think that covers everyone from our side.

3 Crystal, I would just be happy to have you introduce yourself and  
4 potentially your family or however you would like to do it.

5 **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** Well, I am Crystal Mendiuk. So,  
6 Jolene was my sister. Emily was my niece and then Aaron, my brother-in-law. And on  
7 the call as well today is my parents, Bonnie and John Oliver. So, their daughter was  
8 Jolene. Emily their granddaughter and Aaron their son-in-law. So, then obviously, my  
9 counsel. I invited them to attend, you know, just --- it will be helpful for them to just kind  
10 of hear and take notes and I know that there are reports that they are having to do up in  
11 the near future as well. So, this may help facilitate some of those.

12 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Great, thank you.

13 Also, we have added to the room, Mary, who I believe you've met  
14 who is our mental health support.

15 **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** Yes.

16 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** For the Commission, so, she will be  
17 listening as well and if you would like to speak to her directly, we can create a breakout  
18 room and the two of you can talk. Or if you would like to take a break, the same thing  
19 with your counsel. If you need a break just let us know, okay?

20 **MS. CHRYSTAL MENDIUK:** Okay.

21 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** So, let me just restate the purpose of this  
22 session. The purpose is to really allow the Commission to hear from the unique  
23 experiences that you have as family members living through the mass casualty, both  
24 immediately and directly after the event. Your input is critical to helping us formulate the  
25 recommendations that will be coming out of this Commission and as you know, this  
26 work is about protecting Canadian families in the future. And so, for us to make  
27 meaningful and effective recommendations we need to really from and hear from you  
28 and understand what was your experience. What are the things that were helpful and

1 what were the gaps that we can be sure to address in terms of the recommendations  
2 that are part of the final report.

3                   So, my role as a facilitator today is to help the conversation flow. I  
4 have shared three rounds of questions with Crystal in advance as well as Ms. Hupman  
5 and the Commissioners as well. My job is to just kind of keep things on track and to  
6 help the conversation flow. If you have anything that, you know, like, that you would like  
7 to take a break or you would like just to take a moment to collect your thoughts or  
8 review your notes, please just let me know and I am happy to --- we are happy to  
9 accommodate that as we go.

10                   The topics that we are really hoping to hear from you about today is  
11 the experience as a family member, particularly given that you are out of province, the  
12 access you had to information during the mass casualty, the supports and services that  
13 were helpful to you and your family and what was missing that would have been helpful  
14 as well.

15                   I did want to assure you that everyone on the call has read the  
16 interview summary that your family has provided so you don't need to restate that but  
17 you are welcome to refer to it as much as you would like. But that you don't need to  
18 repeat any of those incidences as we go. And also, I just wanted to let you know that  
19 we are recording this call so that it can be made into a transcript. It will not be shared in  
20 terms of the video or the audio but it will be shared as a public document, in terms of the  
21 transcript in both (sic) English and in French (sic). So, that is why we are recording it  
22 tonight. And also, it allows the Commissioners to really listen as opposed to taking  
23 notes. So, that is the other reason that we are recording it.

24                   So, again, happy to have you share as little or as much. We have  
25 the three rounds of questions. I thought we would spend about 15 minutes with each  
26 one and so, we are ready to go as soon as you are. I just wanted to check in and see if  
27 you have anything that you are concerned about or anything that we would like to talk  
28 about before we jump in, Crystal.

1                   **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** No, I am good. Like I said, I have the  
2 questions so I kind of made my notes on the key points, right, that I want to give our  
3 opinion on and our perspective.

4                   **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** And, you know, it is important to me,  
5 Crystal, before we jump in, I just really want to acknowledge how steadfast you have  
6 been in saying, you know, here are the topics and themes that I would like to share.  
7 And you have been always saying, I am in. I want to be a part of the small group  
8 session and so, I just really want to thank you for your commitment, your time and your  
9 energies to doing that. And so, I am really looking forward to our session tonight and  
10 really want to thank you for your courage in advance.

11                   So, the first question is focused on your experience during the time.  
12 So, the question is, what do you want to tell us about your experience seeking  
13 information and getting support during and immediately after the mass casualty? So,  
14 the floor is yours. Thank you, Crystal

15                   **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** Yeah, I think directly during, you know,  
16 realizing that we are three hours ahead, so, by the time we all woke up in the morning,  
17 my mum and dad, you know, had reached out to my sister, you know made those  
18 phone calls and whatnot. So, for us it was a lot of hours of not hearing anything from  
19 anybody. You know, when we finally did get a phone call back, you know, there is  
20 some discrepancies and I know, that, you know, the Commission have gone through  
21 that.

22                   But it was just really difficult not hearing from anybody for such a  
23 long period of time considering the facts of when it actually happened. So, for us and  
24 for me, you know, not being there was extremely difficult and extremely painful being  
25 that, you know what, we couldn't just go down to the local station and get answers. We  
26 couldn't, you know, show up at a crime scene to be told or turned away, right. We didn't  
27 have that option and availability.

28                   So, for us it was even more painstakingly that, you know, we

1 weren't getting answers and we weren't getting phone calls back and we weren't --- you  
2 know, there wasn't any sort of consideration and all that we could do was watch the  
3 news from afar, you know, and hope and pray that they were going to be okay. As far  
4 as in the days directly afterwards, you know, I know that Skipper was an enormous  
5 support to my parents. You know, reaching out to them on a regular, every day basis.

6           We received --- the family received an enormous amount of phone  
7 calls from an enormous amount of people and a lot of departments in that first week.  
8 So, it was very overwhelming with the amount of information that we were getting. The  
9 amount of, you know, requests for information that we were being requested from Victim  
10 Services, and it was just extremely overwhelming and everything Victim Services that  
11 we were trying to process and trying to deal with.

12           I know with regards to the supports and whatnot, you know,  
13 afterwards and during, we found it extremely difficult to utilize from afar. The  
14 documentation that was set out for the families with regards to, you know, the funding  
15 that was being made available was very confusing. Our family, across the board, you  
16 know --- my other sister, my niece, my daughter, my parents, myself, all of us had an  
17 enormous amount of difficulties getting approved for the program.

18           A vast majority of that problem was they didn't have any approved  
19 vendors in Alberta that they could put into their system. So, it took my daughter and I  
20 probably eight months or sorry, eight weeks before we were able to actually get  
21 counselling. My sister, my mum, my niece, we all had the same problem and we all had  
22 the same issue.

23           The other thing with regards to that is, as much as --- I mean there  
24 was funding that was put in place. We did struggle and we had to make numerous  
25 phone calls, numerous emails to Victim Services with regards to --- you know, they had  
26 allocated everybody a certain amount, maybe not considering, we didn't just have one  
27 family member. We had three. So, it was a continual battle to get additional funding  
28 and there was a maximum per session charge that was assigned to it where I can tell



1 you the standards for those kinds of costs in Alberta is substantially higher than it is in  
2 Nova Scotia.

3                   So, we just --- it was a continual uphill battle and quite honestly, it  
4 still is a continual uphill battle for us to have access to funding. Everything now that that  
5 is in place but it is a continual --- having to reach out, get additional funds, you know,  
6 with the understanding that we didn't just have one family member. We had three. So,  
7 that was a big issue that is still ongoing for us.

8                   For me, with regards to support and communications, immediately  
9 after, you know, the events of that weekend, a lot of time has passed and looking back  
10 and reflecting on a lot of things, understanding that this did happen in Nova Scotia and  
11 that, you know, my sister and my niece were Albertans. They were born and raised in  
12 Alberta and all of their family, their entire family, was in Alberta. Not one single RCMP  
13 dispatchment (sic) reached out to my parents. Not Victim Services from Alberta,  
14 nobody from Alberta stopped in to see how my parents were doing.

15                   Now, everybody in Nova Scotia would have had that luxury to a  
16 certain degree of not always having to have emails, phone calls or text messages.  
17 They got to see real people with real feelings and real emotions and we --- nobody in  
18 Alberta came to see us and came to see how we were doing and to offer services from  
19 Alberta. Again, understanding that this happened in a different province. This affected  
20 Canada and there were Canadian programs in place where it always seemed that  
21 everything was being driven from Nova Scotia and it was extremely difficult for, again, a  
22 variety of reasons.

23                   Time difference, always having, you know, phone calls and emails  
24 and there wasn't, you know, a person where, you know, we maybe could have leaned  
25 on to help us get information and get the support that we needed and wanted right from  
26 the very beginning.

27                   I think for the most part, I mean, that is, you know, in a nutshell,  
28 with regards to that; with regards to getting information it did get better over time with

1 regards to not finding out everything through news media sources. You know, getting  
2 the ITO's in advance of them being released to the press or at least showing up in the  
3 newspaper. I mean, it was at least a step in the right direction. I get that it was  
4 released all at the same time but we were given the opportunity to having a few hours to  
5 at least review and know what was coming up before we found out from, you know,  
6 friends and other people in social media.

7                   You know, I think to a certain degree there are still some gaps with  
8 that information not being released or advised to the family in advance. You know, a  
9 prime example I am going to use is, I was fully aware that the Commission was  
10 requesting an extension from the federal and provincial governments for their final  
11 report. So, I knew that the application had gone in and I am not sure again of exactly  
12 what the timing was on that but I found out by reading the news on the internet that it  
13 had been approved.

14                   So, for me, you know, it was again, just one of those things where I  
15 wasn't given the heads up and I wasn't made aware and I had to go to the internet to  
16 find out that kind of information. So, it still happens. It is upsetting because I think in  
17 my eyes and the eyes of my family and probably a lot of other families, is, yes, we are  
18 all considered to be public but I think in a lot of cases it would have been nice if we were  
19 perceived to maybe be privileged public and got things not just because everybody else  
20 was getting them as well.

21                   **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Crystal, one of the things in your interview  
22 summary is that you speak about Constable Bent as a lifeline to the family.

23                   **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** Yes.

24                   **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** I was wondering if you could talk a little bit  
25 about what were the services or what were the functions that he performed that would  
26 have you say that? It is not about reviewing his behaviour. It is about understanding  
27 what he did that would be really helpful to families in the future. So, I was just  
28 wondering if you could talk a little bit about that?

1                   **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** I think a lot of what it was is, you know,  
2 knowing that he was the family liaison for all purposes. You know, again, he reached  
3 out on the Monday to my parents, you know, to you know --- basically to find out, right. I  
4 mean, at that point in time he didn't --- that was his first contact and he didn't know what  
5 we knew. He didn't know what we didn't know or what kind of information we had. You  
6 know?

7                   He gave his phone number, you know, email, access if we had any  
8 questions or any concerns. And I think to a certain degree what it was is, he was  
9 constantly checking in. He was constantly calling. You know, if he had information that  
10 wasn't pertinent to an ongoing investigation, as per se, you know, he would --- you  
11 know, he would call and give us a head's up that things were coming out. You know  
12 me, of the other things that I think that were really important for my mum and dad, again  
13 with the --- there were other difficulties going on and around there and knowing that the  
14 house was, for all intents and purposes, I mean, it was locked with a key but it was  
15 abandoned. And we knew that --- you know, we didn't know what the security was and  
16 we didn't know a variety of other things and we knew that we couldn't get there.

17                  And you know, my mum was panicked because my niece's fiddles  
18 were in the house and those were her prized possessions. And so, you know what, my  
19 mum reached out to him and said, like, I am sickened that they are there and I am  
20 scared that they are going to get, you know, stolen or something. And he is, you know -  
21 -- no issue, no problem. I will go and I will collect them and I will keep them safe. So, it  
22 was the little things like that where, again, not being there, not knowing the situation and  
23 the circumstances.

24                  My mum, you know, would call him at any hour at any time, you  
25 know, with a question that popped into her head. You know, oh my God, what is going  
26 on with this and when are they moving them or, you know, where is this at or where is  
27 that at or ---? You know, there were a few other things that, you know, again, that came  
28 up because of the circumstances, you know, with some uncertainties and some

1 harassments that were taking place. So, we could reach out to him about anything and  
2 he would either help us, guide us, look into it for us, give us those answers. He was just  
3 there twenty-four seven. It didn't matter.

4 Call, text, leave a --- you know, if he'd see my mum and dad's  
5 phone number come up on his phone, at the next opportunity he would call back and he  
6 was just --- he was just there as the person that was going to be their eyes and their  
7 ears and find out for them their questions or help direct them to places that we needed  
8 to go or that we needed to call.

9 So, I think it was --- you know, and I mean, I can say that it was his  
10 job but he did more than just his job for months because this wasn't just days. This was  
11 months and months where any one of us could pick up the phone and call him and he  
12 would answer and he would help us. And he would direct us or give us, you know,  
13 advice or whatever it was he was there.

14 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** I am hearing you say that that role is very  
15 important to have to support families and that the sooner that we can connect a family  
16 with the Liaison Officer the better and in this case, it sounds, especially since you were  
17 away, he was your boots on the ground here in the province.

18 **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** Yes.

19 **MR. JOHN OLIVER:** Yep.

20 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Are there any other things that come to  
21 mind in terms of supports that you received during this time that were very helpful? I  
22 hear your feedback about the transactional nature of the mental health support. I was  
23 just wondering if there were any other things that ---

24 You also mentioned that there was some difference between the victims ---

25 **Zoom program:** Recording in progress---

26 Victim Services and the ---.

27 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Victim Services in Alberta. Just --- could  
28 you give us a little more about that?

1 **COMMISSIONER FITCH:** Sorry.

2 **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** Well, I mean Victim Services are ---  
3 even though they are provincial, they --- they are across the country and I think my  
4 issue and my concern was --- is that, even though this was something that happened in  
5 Nova Scotia and that the funding that we were getting was part of the *Criminal Injuries*  
6 *Act*, that nobody in Alberta --- nobody in Alberta reached out to us to help us.

7 You know, there was an individual at Victims Services because it  
8 got extremely frustrating and painstaking. I, at that point in time, had an employer that,  
9 you know, provided counselling services through my work and we had gone that route  
10 and were extremely unsuccessful with the individuals. They were not qualified under  
11 those kinds of programs, to deal with this. You know, there were some illnesses that  
12 were taking place that, you know ---

13 Our doctors had kind of pushed us into, kind of our Alberta Health  
14 Services, as there are --- you know, there is funding and there are those kinds of things  
15 as well. You know, again, it just seemed that they didn't have the qualified people  
16 within those systems or programs. So, I did reach out to Victim Services, you know, in  
17 Nova Scotia and said, I have exhausted all of my avenues that I have here in Alberta. I  
18 really have no idea what the process is to access, you know, these funds and this  
19 funding. However, I really just need somebody qualified in Alberta.

20 You know, at that point in time she said, you know, obviously my  
21 mum had a very qualified counselor that she is very happy with but she is two hours  
22 away and so, you know, then it was beginning the process where she said, well, here is  
23 a company and here are some counselors for you. And that was fine and so, my  
24 daughter and I reviewed them and looked at them.

25 So, we, you know, we chose the counselors that said, okay, well,  
26 we need all of this paperwork because now they have to be an approved counselor for  
27 the program and through the system. And one of the counselors actually didn't even  
28 get approved and it was extremely frustrating that they recommended counselors and a

1 company that wasn't on their list. And of course, I had asked her the question. I said,  
2 "Well, how many approved vendors in Alberta does Nova Scotia have?"

3 She says, "Wwell, we have your mum's and she says, "and I think  
4 your sister's is on there as well and we might have one in Calgary." And I said, " Okay  
5 well, this is kind of a problem because now you don't have anybody approved for us and  
6 now it is going to be another 8 to 10 weeks before I can access counseling because  
7 they are not on your list." So, that was frustrating. She did all she could and she was  
8 extremely helpful but it just seemed that every time I turned around, it just was --- there  
9 were more barriers and more barriers.

10 And then, after we finally got the individuals approved, that they  
11 had actually recommended, then they had a problem with their fee that they were  
12 charging. And it was a standard fee for Alberta so then it was another process where  
13 we couldn't get to counselling until we could get the fee approved because we just  
14 simply didn't have the means to be putting out the difference of that kind of money.

15 It did in the end all get resolved but it probably took about three  
16 months and it was extremely time consuming, extremely disheartening and it was just --  
17 - it was an uphill battle that I just didn't need.

18 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** And so, I am hearing you say that you ---

19 **COMMISSIONER STANTON:** Sorry, hang on just a minute.

20 Maureen, there's a button ---? Third from the left at the top of your computer.

21 **COMMISSIONER STANTON:** So, just for your awareness,  
22 Crystal, Bonnie and John, all of us at the Commission are in a boardroom together so  
23 that we wanted you to be able to see our faces on the screen rather than just a bunch of  
24 us in a boardroom. But we thought because it is important to us to really be together to  
25 hear from the families, so, we are in a room together and we should have explained that  
26 at the beginning. And we are having a little bit of some, you know, growing pains with  
27 our tech. So, bear with us, while we just make sure that we're able to give you our  
28 undivided attention.

1 **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** Okay.

2 **COMMISSIONER STANTON:** So, sorry about that interruption and  
3 I think we are good now.

4 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Yeah.

5 **COMMISSIONER STANTON:** Okay, thank you.

6 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** So, thank you for that, Crystal. What I am  
7 hearing you say is that if there was some way to streamline getting mental health  
8 support approved, especially out of province, so that it wouldn't put all the work on your  
9 shoulders that would be helpful.

10 **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** Yes.

11 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Yes.

12 **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** And I know with my experience that  
13 was one but I for all intents and purposes became and I was the family liaison for all of  
14 the legal, all of the Commission, the Health Services. So, it --- you know, there were  
15 other issues where every time there was a problem or an issue, you know, again,  
16 because I had the contacts, the connections, the emails, the systems kind of thing, you  
17 know, I took that on. So, you know, when they were going to cut my mum off  
18 counseling funding as well, you know, it was working with, you know, having her doctor  
19 send in the letter and then communicating back and forth with Victim Services and  
20 those kinds of things.

21 Because, you know, it was a stress that my mum didn't need either.  
22 So, I had the contacts but it --- each and every one of us had problems, issues and  
23 concerns and so I, you know, ended up dealing with all of them myself. And you know,  
24 so, it was kind of disheartening when I finally went to go for counseling that, you know, I  
25 ended up with the same struggles and similar issues that we all had.

26 And it was just --- it was very frustrating in a very frustrating time.

27 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** So, I think I am ready to move on to round  
28 two; the question for round two. Are you feeling ready for that?

1                   **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** I am good.

2                   **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Okay, great. So, the second round of  
3 questions is that, much of the work for the Commission that lies ahead is to formulate  
4 the recommendations that will be in our final report and we want those to be effective  
5 and meaningful for families. We are interested in hearing which issues are most  
6 important to you for the Commission to focus on as we finalize those recommendations.

7                   **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** I think for me, and I know it is very  
8 broad, but for me it is communication and follow-up with the families. I know that there  
9 were a lot of family members because of, you know, the mass amount of people that  
10 were, you know --- that tragically lost their lives. But communication and follow up, you  
11 know, from the RCMP, the medical examiners, the Victim Services, you know, the Mass  
12 Casualty Commission itself.

13                   You know, there are very many instances where we had to  
14 reactively search and find either departments or people or lean on, you know, our  
15 lawyers and other people because we were not getting the communications and we  
16 were not getting the follow-up, you know. And, unfortunately, yes, I mean, Victim  
17 Services was a lot of that because Victim Services is involved in so many things as far  
18 as there are communications that come out with from them in other areas and other  
19 aspects. The court cases, for example, and other things.

20                   So, there are a lot of things and a lot of information that were  
21 coming from Victim Services that I received, you know, via email but not once ever did  
22 anybody from Victim Services, even though they have our phone numbers and  
23 everything --- not once ever did anybody actually pick up the phone and ask, you know,  
24 how is counselling going. How is the process going? You know, is there anything more  
25 that ---

26                   I get an enormous amount of emails and kid yourself not, the  
27 amount of emails that I get with regards to this whole situation is astronomically  
28 enormous but not once did anybody ever pick up the phone and call. Are the services



1 working? Is there anything more that we could do? Is there something else that we can  
2 help you with? Nobody every followed up with any of that. Even still, to this day, you  
3 know, again, my daughter and I and my mother, I know, as well, we are still in  
4 counselling and it is always a reactive measure to --- have I run out of funding again.

5           And they have topped up funding a couple of times and when they  
6 top up funding, they usually only top up with half of the dollar amount but keeping in  
7 mind, our counselling is twice as much. So, it does get used up faster. You know, we  
8 have talked to them and expressed, right, there were three family members so it is ---  
9 You know, we are just trying to get the help.

10           And I know, for myself, being so directly involved with everything  
11 and day-to-day and you know, and I know that my parents, keeping them updated and  
12 in the loop and whatnot, it is a reactive measure that I continually have to deal with  
13 ensuring that there is still funding available for all of us that are still in counselling. So,  
14 that is one of the issues for me is that with certain things like that there is not a lot of  
15 follow up.

16           Even in the beginning, like I said, as much as --- I mean, Skipper  
17 was great, phenomenal. You know was in constant, you know, communication but  
18 some of the other departments as well ---

19           One of the struggles that we had within the first couple of weeks  
20 and understandably not a lot of people had a lot of answers about a lot of things but  
21 being that we were so far away, some of the key issues for us was, the timing of when  
22 things were going to happen. You know, the movement of the bodies from the house to  
23 the medical examiner; from the medical examiner, right. How long is this going to take?  
24 When are they going to get to the funeral home and those kinds of things.

25           For us, having those kinds of details and having that kind of  
26 communication kind of leads me into one of the other issues that is probably, for my  
27 family, is one of the biggest, most upsetting issues in the whole situation. And that was,  
28 we weren't allowed access to come into the province for two weeks and we were

1 continually told, you can't come. We need to get approval. The Health Ministers, the  
2 Premiers, the Prime Minister, I mean, there was an enormous amount of provincial and  
3 federal government people involved in this.

4           It came to light that nobody was willing to give the green light for us  
5 to come into the province until the RCMP released the crime scene. But nobody was  
6 discussing any of that with us so we had no idea. Are we talking three days, five days,  
7 ten days? There was no real communication on how long we had to wait. We just kept  
8 being told, we are working on it. We are working on it. We're working on it.? Well, what  
9 ended up happening is, the ME released the bodies nine days after they had died to the  
10 funeral home. It was the Monday, the 27<sup>th</sup> and decisions had to be made.

11           My parents weren't sleeping knowing that their daughter and their  
12 granddaughter were laying on a slab in a cooler and had been for almost ten days. So,  
13 decisions had to be made as to what we were going to do. Now knowing that it had  
14 almost been ten days, we could have embalmed them so that we could have seen them  
15 or we could have just cremated them but nobody had any sort of timeline for us.

16           Nobody had any sort of direction and at that point in time, we  
17 weren't even sure ten days later if embalming them and seeing them was going to be  
18 anything that should have been done anyways. We as a family, because we didn't  
19 know, we ended up cremating them on Friday, May 1<sup>st</sup> and they gave us approval to  
20 come into the province Saturday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>.

21           So, maybe we could have waited but because of those decisions,  
22 lack of communication and truly the lack of understanding that my parents were not  
23 being able to hold their daughter's hand one last time and I think of anything that failed  
24 in the process after the fact, that by far failed my family. And I wish now, I maybe would  
25 have gotten more upset and more angry before we had to have them cremated, in the  
26 sense that it could have just been a fly in, fly out.

27           We didn't need the crime scene to be released for my parents to  
28 say goodbye to their daughter or their granddaughter. So, that is something that

1 between the provincial, federal and the RCMP, that is something that they stole from my  
2 family that they can't ever, ever, give us back. And that alone should never have to  
3 happen to another family again. We should have been --- we should have been able to  
4 see them.

5 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Thank you, Crystal.

6 **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** So, I think those are some of the  
7 things, for us, that we found extremely difficult.

8 **COMMISSIONER STANTON:** This added a whole other layer of  
9 hurt on to you.

10 **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** Yes, yeah and I mean, I believe most  
11 of the other families, unfortunately, I know that there were families that ended up, you  
12 know, being in the houses that were on fire and whatnot, but I believe the vast majority  
13 of the people that were left and weren't burnt in their houses, they were all in Nova  
14 Scotia and they all had family in Nova Scotia and they all had somebody that was able  
15 to go and say goodbye. And we were not. They had nobody. They had nobody there  
16 for them or with them when that happened. So, that was stolen and it is something that  
17 can't ever --- it can't be undone. And it is just --- it is extremely frustrating and  
18 heartbreaking that, collectively, everybody decided that they would give us approval 24  
19 hours later. And I don't know whether it was because, at that point in time ---

20 And I know it is my family notes, but yeah, I got mad on Saturday  
21 morning when I woke up Saturday morning knowing what had happened the day before,  
22 I got mad and I, basically, I told my mum, I said, you call the contacts that you have and  
23 there was a few of them that she had with the provincial government, the federal  
24 government. There were all kinds of --- and I said, I am --- there is a direct flight  
25 tomorrow and I am leaving tomorrow. And you better call whoever you need to call and  
26 give them a heads' up because I am leaving and stop me if you dare.

27 And I regret that I didn't do that sooner because within hours of her  
28 making that call and I mean, Skipper was one of the calls she made and she said, like,

1 Crystal is coming. She is getting on a plane. She is coming ready or not. And  
2 everybody miraculously were able to get together and say, okay we will book you flights.  
3 So, it just happened to be 24 hours too late to say goodbye. So, that should never have  
4 happened and if that is one thing that doesn't ever happen again to any other family  
5 ever, that one is a big one.

6 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Hearing it from you, Crystal, really brings it  
7 home. I appreciate your courage to even relive that painful experience. It does --- I  
8 want you to know that hearing your first-hand experience of what that was like to live  
9 through is not falling on deaf ears. We really, really appreciate it.

10 **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** Thank you.

11 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Any other issues that would be helpful to  
12 highlight?

13 **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** There is one other one and it is, for all  
14 intents and purposes, it is somewhat trivial. However, it was a constant reminder that,  
15 to a certain degree we felt that being out here in Alberta and in western Canada that it --  
16 - that we didn't matter as much and that it --- we are so far away. We got emails that  
17 came out and there has been --- there have been multiple emails but there were a  
18 couple of emails that started coming out right around the two-year anniversary.

19 One of the emails that came out was from the Attorney General and  
20 Minister of Justice. So, again, these are always forwarded from --- generally from either  
21 the Justice Department or Victim Services. And in a lot of the correspondence like that,  
22 that comes out, the very first sentence of this email that went out was, "The events of  
23 April 20 rest heavily on the hearts of every Nova Scotian. Nobody had felt that more than  
24 you."

25 Okay, well, the problem is, I am not a Nova Scotian. My family, my  
26 sister and my niece weren't. They lived in Nova Scotia but they were born and raised in  
27 Alberta so for them to send out notification and basically, their hearts are with every  
28 Nova Scotian. Well, that is great but their hearts should have been with every Canadian

1 not every Nova Scotian. And there are numerous circumstances where, again,  
2 correspondence goes out or things happen and again, I respect ---

3 I know where this happened. I know exactly where this happened  
4 but the fact that it is always just about Nova Scotians is extremely disheartening  
5 because we lost just as much as Nova Scotians did. In some cases, we lost an entire  
6 branch of our family. We didn't just lose a mother and a father. We didn't just lose a  
7 child. We didn't just lose the parent. We lost an entire branch of our family. All of  
8 them. All gone. But a lot of people's hearts are with Nova Scotians.

9 So, being cognizant of those kinds of things, because when we get  
10 those emails, it is just frustrating and it is just disheartening because of anybody, I have  
11 really tried to do my due diligence and be there for my family that I lost and put in the  
12 time and the effort. I am not about showboating or being in the media. I am just about  
13 getting the results and helping the Commission get the results and do their jobs and it  
14 just seem that it is forgotten that this didn't just affect Nova Scotia.

15 That there are people outside of Nova Scotia that this affected.  
16 And I know that I am not the only one. I mean, there is a family in the United States, in  
17 New Mexico, you know, Ontario, Winnipeg. There were a lot more and so, it is --- being  
18 mindful of, again, I mean, it came out from the Attorney General, the Justice Minister. It  
19 was like, so many in Alberta seem to have forgotten and don't remember because they  
20 were millions, you know --- we are miles and miles away. So, to have people in Nova  
21 Scotia forget that as well is sometimes disheartening.

22 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Thank you for that. The final round of  
23 questions is just to say, is there anything else that you would like to share about your  
24 experience? You have covered so much tonight that I am not trying to, in any way,  
25 minimize all the other things that you have shared. They have been powerful. It is just  
26 the round three question is, is there anything else that you think that would be important  
27 for us to understand about your experience, the family?

28 **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** I am going to read you something. I

1 was asked a couple of months ago, through my counsel, if I wanted to comment on, you  
2 know, what was going on with the Mass Casualty Commission and those kinds of  
3 things. And you know, again, I am --- I don't have social media, so, I am not part of that  
4 social media world, you know, media world if you will. There were a lot of things that  
5 had come up and I would like to read it because I think it does somewhat express some  
6 of the emotions and issues and things that we have gone through. So, if you don't  
7 mind, I am just going to read it.

8 "The past year has been emotionally, mentally and physically  
9 draining. The vast amount of information to review and comment on has been daunting  
10 and an exhausting task. I do have way more Information than I did before the Inquiry  
11 started, not that it has all been good. In recent months we have become frustrated with  
12 some of the decisions made by the Commission. Specifically, with some of the  
13 accommodations made with respect to some key witnesses.

14 The Commission claimed to be following a trauma informed  
15 strategy, however, I promise you that in most cases, the accommodations have caused  
16 more trauma to the families that actually lost loved ones. It is because of their loss of  
17 life that we are even here having a Public Inquiry and yet, at every turn it is the living  
18 that are being accommodated. The ones that still have their lives from that night or  
19 were making the decisions that weekend. It is extremely disheartening and frustrating.

20 So many lives were lost that weekend and very few, if any  
21 accommodations are being made for any of us. From the beginning I knew that this  
22 was going to be a process. That there would be policies and protocol and that things  
23 would happen in stages. I have tried not to get caught up in the process and some of  
24 the decisions made with regards to that process but to keep my focus on the end result,  
25 the recommendations.

26 And most importantly, the changes made as a result of that horrific  
27 weekend. Real changes, not superficial changes as these changes are the legacy of  
28 our loved ones that died tragically that weekend. My greatest fear when the Public

1 Inquiry ends is the realization that real change is not actually going to happen at all and  
2 that my family did die horrifically in vain and that the real truth about what happened  
3 may have died with all of them.

4 For me, this Public Inquiry is my family's legacy. The changes  
5 made that come out of this will mean that they will live on forever and my fear in some  
6 situations and in some cases is that maybe real change isn't going to be made and it is  
7 just an illusion." And that is all I have about that.

8 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Thank you for sharing that. It is very  
9 honest. I was just wondering if the Commissioners have any questions or anything they  
10 would like to say.

11 **COMMISSIONER STANTON:** You'll have to turn on your sound.

12 **COMMISSIONER FITCH:** I just want to thank you all for joining us  
13 this evening. When we first met back in 2021, we wanted to know about your loved  
14 ones and what your expectations were of the Inquiry going forward. It is heart  
15 wrenching to hear, not only the heartbreak of the loss of an entire branch of your family  
16 but also how the systems that are in place to help continue to let you down. And the  
17 last thing that any of us want to do, here on the Commission, is to add to your pain and  
18 suffering. So, for that I am sorry.

19 I appreciate, truly, Crystal, you speaking on behalf of your family  
20 and carrying that message forward and your courage in doing so. And speaking so  
21 honestly and although we might not get it right all the time, I assure you we are trying  
22 our hardest to do our best for all of the families, for those that lost loved ones and for all  
23 Canadians and for the families down in the United States as well. So, that hasn't been  
24 lost on us and please be assured that the work that we are doing is going to be going on  
25 through robust recommendations. And we rely on many people to carry those  
26 recommendations forward. And as a former police officer I just --- I feel in some of  
27 these family meetings that I want to apologize for my profession, even though I am not  
28 in the RCMP. Thank you.

1                   **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** I appreciate that. I, like I said, I've  
2 been, from the beginning, the key person and have gone through and done and  
3 communicated with the lawyers and, you know, all of that kind of stuff. And for me, right  
4 from the very beginning, you know, a lot of people asked why. Why am I taking on so  
5 much additional responsibility and heartache and headache and it is not always easy.  
6 And there are times where it is extremely difficult and painful but I do it for them and I  
7 have, right from the very beginning.

8                   So, being able to help give you guys insight and thought and you  
9 know, help with the recommendations going forward, it is because I have a vested  
10 interest in this. I am here for them. I am not here for me. Quite honestly, I am not even  
11 here for you. I am here for the family that I lost. So, it is extremely important that this  
12 gets done and it gets done right. And everything and anything that I can do, I have  
13 done to do that and to honour my family.

14                   **COMMISSIONER STANTON:** One of the things we have been  
15 quite preoccupied with is implementation of the recommendations because as all of us  
16 knows, there has been a lot of past inquiries with a lot of recommendations that don't  
17 always get implemented and as you also probably know, we don't, as a Commission,  
18 have the power to order implementation.

19                   So, what we are trying to do is, find who will be responsible for the  
20 recommendations that we make and how can we best hold them accountable for that.  
21 And once the Inquiry finishes its work, it is going to depend on people like yourself to  
22 continue on with that accountability piece. And we will do our best to try to identify  
23 whose feet you have to hold to the fire in the coming years and part of our report will  
24 focus on implementation and what we can do to try to ensure that the memories of your  
25 branch of your family are honoured with that. We certainly acknowledge we haven't  
26 always got it right. We will continue to try to get it right but it really is important for us to  
27 hear what you have to say and we are very grateful for the opportunity to hear you say  
28 it.



1                   **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** Thank you.

2                   **COMMISSIONER MacDONALD:** Yeah, thank you so very much  
3 for your powerful, poignant, courageous assistance you have given us. It has been very  
4 helpful. I deeply appreciate your honesty in all aspects including your comments about  
5 the work that we did. We, in each and every decision, you know, sometimes they are  
6 difficult decisions and as my friends have said, we don't boast of always getting it right  
7 but we are always trying to do right by the memory of your family and all the families  
8 and that is what motivates us in our work.

9                   And I am so sorry for the experience that you have had as well as  
10 and including our own involvement but you can rest assured that every day we have  
11 and will continue to have the same motivation that you do. And that is that, that your  
12 family, your wonderful entire branch, as you have said, of your family, their lives and  
13 their memories will not have been in vain and that is our commitment. That can't  
14 happen.

15                   And we will have thoughtful and pragmatic recommendations  
16 covering the things you have discussed and more. And we will count on you and others  
17 and we will do our best as Commissioner Stanton has said, to do what we can from our  
18 end to make sure that not only are they pragmatic and doable but that there is a path for  
19 how they would be done and who would be accountable for doing it. So, we will do our  
20 very best on that end but I am so sorry and so touched by the experience that you have  
21 been through and the loss you have endured.

22                   And I am speaking, not just to you, Crystal, but to you, Mr. and Mrs.  
23 Oliver and your entire family. I am so touched by your story and your loss and that will  
24 continue to motivate us. So, thank you for the courage and I know this meant reliving  
25 and that is why your gift is doubly appreciated. It is doubly appreciated the fact that you  
26 have had to tell this story and relive those memories but it is very important for us and  
27 we deeply, deeply appreciate it. Thank you so much.

28                   **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** You are welcome.

1                   **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Crystal, I will give the last word to you. If  
2 there is anything else that you would like to say. Otherwise, we will go ahead and close  
3 this meeting. Any final thoughts or any final words from you?

4                   **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** No, I think just, you know, again, I am  
5 one of those thoughtful, thought-provoking individuals that truly just wants to help and I  
6 just want, you know, I want the same thing that I am hearing that all of the  
7 Commissioners want as well. I am wanting for this to be successful and I am fully  
8 aware that, you know, the recommendations are not law and, you know, that there are  
9 people that are going to be accountable and, you know, like Commissioner Stanton said  
10 as well, you know, I don't have a problem being one of those people.

11                   You know what? You give me the list of people that are  
12 responsible for the changes and I have no problem holding people's feet to fires. So,  
13 you know, and it is going to take --- it is going to take people like myself, you know, and  
14 other Canadians alike, you know, to ensure that that happens.

15                   And I don't think that I am alone in saying that, you know what,  
16 there is a great deal of us that are actually going to take this recommendation from this  
17 Public Inquiry maybe a little bit more seriously than any of the other ones have in the  
18 past. So, I am always here and available for my thoughts and opinions and you know,  
19 in some cases I try to make sure that they are thoughtful and not entirely emotionally  
20 driven because as much as there is an emotion in all of this, it is not always helpful in  
21 getting to the end result.

22                   So, I know that there are breakout sessions coming up as well and I  
23 am more than willing to be a part of anything where feedback from my perspective,  
24 because I am in a different situation than the vast majority of the other families were in  
25 with my distance. And so, if I can maybe help shed some light on some gaps from my  
26 perspective, I am more than happy to do that.

27                   **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** So, thank you very much. I saw your  
28 parents smiling there, just acknowledging, you know, that you are a powerful warrior

1 and that you have really given us a lot of inspiration for the work that we do. And it is,  
2 you know, in some ways I will reflect on this as a staff person, that this Commission is a  
3 marathon and we are kind of grinding. You know, we are kind of like at mile 22 and,  
4 you know, we are going to make it and we are going to do it.

5 But, you know, your contribution tonight, Crystal, was, you know,  
6 the fuel and the inspiration to continue through that final tape. And that I --- you know,  
7 we do feel like you do that the recommendations are the most important legacy from the  
8 Commission and in honour of all of the families. So, thank you for that voice today  
9 because none of us have that unique perspective and we just really appreciate your  
10 courage.

11 And I also just wanted to acknowledge your parents. You have  
12 raised a remarkably strong daughter that she is willing to spend an hour with us today.  
13 Thank you for that and thank you for your willingness to be here as well. So, I will call  
14 our meeting to a close and if there is anything else, you know, that comes along, you  
15 know, in the weeks ahead, please feel free to reach out and email. This is not the final,  
16 final and we are happy to receive further submissions and your writing was beautiful,  
17 Crystal. That is what I do a lot for my living and there was a clarity there that really rang  
18 true. So, thank you for taking the time to do that.

19 **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** You are welcome.

20 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Wishing you all a wonderful evening.

21  
22  
23



C1

24 **COMMISSIONER FITCH:** That's great. So, thank you all. You  
25 have done a lot of work for us.

26 **COMMISSIONER MacDONALD:** Thank you and thank you, Ms.  
27 Hupman. Thank you for all your support of the commission. We greatly appreciate it.

28 **MS. LINDA HUPMAN:** It has been my pleasure. It has --- I just

1 have to say that Crystal is a real inspiration to work with her and to be part of her  
2 counsel team it has been --- she has been amazing to work with. And actually, I will  
3 take this opportunity, Crystal, to apologize to you while the commissioners are present.  
4 It is on us that we failed to get the word to you last week about the extension of time. It  
5 came in Thursday night. It was public on Friday and I guess it just fell off our radar on  
6 Friday to get that word to you.

7 So, I just want you to know that we wear that of that and --- but  
8 again, you and your family have --- it has been a real pleasure and an honour to be  
9 working with you and to be representing you before the Commission.

10 **MS. CRYSTAL MENDIUK:** Thank you.

11 **MR. LEO ARTALEJO:** Thank you everyone. Have a good  
12 evening.

13 **COMMISSIONER MacDONALD:** Thank you all very much. Take  
14 care.

15  
16 --- Session concludes

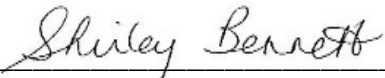
17

18 **C E R T I F I C A T I O N**

19

20 I, SHIRLEY BENNETT, hereby certify the foregoing pages to be an accurate  
21 transcription of the audio recording provided to the best of my skill and ability, and I so  
22 swear.

23

24   
\_\_\_\_\_

25 SHIRLEY BENNETT