



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE

Audrey Nicoll MSP  
Convener  
Criminal Justice Committee

Citizen Participation and Public  
Petitions Committee  
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The Scottish Parliament  
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By e mail only—

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26 January 2024

Dear Audrey

### **[PE1948: Improve the way that unexplained deaths are dealt with](#)**

*Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to encourage Police Scotland to review their practices for dealing with unexplained deaths from initial recovery through to the support that is offered to family members.*

This petition was lodged by Alex O’Kane on 8 August 2022 and has been considered by the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on three occasions, most recently at its meeting on 24 January 2024. At that meeting, the Committee agreed to close the petition under Rule 15.7 of Standing Orders. One of the reasons for closure was that we are aware of the relevant work being undertaken by your Committee through both your scrutiny of the Police (Ethics, Conduct and Scrutiny) (Scotland) Bill and the Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform Bill, and the Committee’s interest in trauma-informed working.

Alex O’Kane provides support, advice and advocacy through his voluntary, local community group called No1Seems2Care. As part of his work, Alex has been supporting a mother, Stephanie Bonner, following the death of her 19-year-old son, Rhys Bonner. His work with Stephanie informed the petition and we subsequently decided to invite Stephanie to give evidence to the Committee on [22 February 2023](#).

Rhys Bonner went missing on 24 July 2019. His body was later discovered on Thursday 8 August 2019 and the investigation was closed on Monday 12 August 2019.

Stephanie shared her distress at the quality and timeframe of the investigation throughout the session, stating “That was one day spent investigating my son’s death. My son’s life was worth one full working day to Police Scotland.” It was found that Police Scotland failed to fully investigate Stephanie’s complaints regarding the investigation into Rhys’s death after four points were upheld by the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner.

The need for strong communication with families impacted by unexplained deaths was raised. In particular, Stephanie stated that she did not feel supported and that “Police Scotland has spent more time trying to convince the media how much they have supported me than they actually have spent with me. Police Scotland has displayed more spin-doctoring than sympathy.” To address this, Stephanie stressed the importance of family liaison officers and that the deployment of liaison officers should be embedded into the process.

Concerns were raised about postcode policing, with Stephanie stating that she believes postcodes play a “significant factor in the decision making of the police and the theories that they form.” Raising this issue again, Stephanie asked: “Do you really believe that if Rhys was the son of a lawyer from an affluent area this investigation would have looked like this?”

In closing the petition, the committee clerks have been in contact with the petitioner to offer the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Police (Ethics, Conduct and Scrutiny) Scotland Bill. I would like to thank you for agreeing to extend the deadline for the petitioner and Stephanie on this occasion.

Members of the Committee were moved by Stephanie’s personal strength and testimony. The Committee asks that the work of the petitioner and Stephanie Bonner be considered as part of the Criminal Justice Committee’s ongoing scrutiny.

The [Official Report](#) of the meeting will be published by 6pm on Wednesday 31 January. In the meantime, a recording of the meeting is also available to view [online](#).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. K. M.', written in a cursive style.

**Jackson Carlaw MSP**

Convener