

# Inquiry closing statements begin

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THUNDER BAY -- The inquest into the cases of seven youths from remote First Nations who died while they were attending high school in Thunder Bay between 2000 and 2011 has begun its third and final stage.

Closing statements were made on Wednesday as the inquest resumed into the deaths of Robyn Harper, Jethro Anderson, Reggie Bushie, Jordan Wabasse, Curran Strang, Paul Panacheese and Kyle Morriseau.

The jury will deliberate how the teenagers died and what caused their deaths as it considers 185 recommendations to ensure the circumstances that led to those deaths are not repeated in the future.

In the cases of Bushie, Morriseau, Anderson and Wabasse, the families' counsel said their clients were frustrated with the inquest's outcome. In all four cases, the young men's bodies were found clothed and drowned in local rivers, yet the cause and manner of their deaths remain uncertain.

"When we went into it, we were hopeful we would have more answers," said co-counsel to the families Christa Big Canoe.

"I've heard a number of clients, including Christian Morriveau and Derek Jacob say 'it feels worse now because we have more questions than answers.'"

While counsel to the families urged the jury to find the cause of those four deaths to be undetermined, it asked its members to find a systemic failure was responsible for Harper's death.

The 18-year-old died of alcohol poisoning and was left to spend the night on the floor of a hallway in her boarding home only days after she had moved to Thunder Bay to pursue her education.

"It's the position of the Harper family that the manner of death is homicide," said Jonathan Rudin, who serves as co-counsel to six of the seven youths' families.

"In this case, we argue homicide is the correct verdict because there were people who were trusted in Robyn's care and they ailed in their duty to her."

Big Canoe and Rudin were the first to submit their recommendations. Submissions from other organizations followed including Ardelle Sagutcheway, a member of the provincial advocate for children and youth advisory committee.

"We're here for the prevention of death so I think the recommendations are important so that future kids will not have to be harmed when they're here going to school," she said.

Submissions will continue on Thursday.