



NATSILS

**NATIONAL ABORIGINAL & TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER LEGAL SERVICES**

MEDIA RELEASE

16 August 2016

Ms Maher's tragic death while in a police station cell in NSW requires urgent investigation

On behalf of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) Co-chairs, Mr Wayne Muir and Ms Cheryl Axleby, would like to express their sincere condolences to Ms Maher's family, friends and community.

Despite Ms Maher's life coming to a tragic end in a Maitland Police Station cell on 19 July 2016, our member organisation the Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT (ALS NSW/ACT) was unable to confirm Ms Maher's death until 12 August 2016 – some three weeks after the tragic event.

"The death of Ms Maher, a 36 year old women from Raymond Terrace NSW, in a holding cell of the Maitland Police Station on 19 July 2016 is deeply troubling and reinforces the need for a well-functioning custody notification system" said NATSILS Co-chair Mr Wayne Muir.

"Any death in custody is too many and the investigation into Ms Maher's death must proceed immediately and comprehensively."

The Custody Notification System (CNS) in New South Wales – and those like it in some other jurisdictions – was introduced following a recommendation from the 1991 Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, which this year had its 25th Anniversary.

Unlike other states, provisions in relation to notification in NSW are enshrined in State legislation.

"The CNS between NSW Police and the ALS NSW/ACT is considered to be best practice and currently has the financial backing of the Federal Government," said Mr Muir.

Questions remain about how the ALS NSW/ACT was not notified at the time of Ms Maher's tragic death.

"It's a good system with police and the ALS working together to make sure Aboriginal people in custody are provided with early legal advice, and are safe. We're very concerned there's been a procedural failure this time, and that we were not notified of Ms Maher's detainment," said Mr Gary Oliver, CEO ALS NSW ACT.

Media Contact: Karly Warner on kwarn@vals.org.au or by phone 0423 610 587.