

Chair of the London Assembly



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Lord Chief Justice

The Lord Burnett of Maldon
Royal Courts of Justice
The Strand
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14 February 2018

Dear Lord Chief Justice,

At its Plenary meeting on 8 February 2018, the London Assembly unanimously agreed the following motion:

“The requirement of the Mayor and Greater London Authority to promote good relations between Londoners belonging to different racial groups, religious beliefs and sexual orientation is as important today as it ever has been. We welcome the Mayor’s commitment on this issue and the work that has been done to date.

However, this Assembly is concerned that the conduct of the Senior Coroner for Inner North London, Mary Hassell, is failing Jewish and Muslim residents of Camden, Hackney, Islington and Tower Hamlets in respect of the particular requirements of those faiths concerning the deceased. According to the Jewish and Muslim faiths it is an important principle that a deceased person should be buried as soon as possible after death, and ideally the day of death. It is therefore customary to make every effort to expedite the burial. Over the past four and a half years bereaved relatives in the jurisdiction of the Senior Coroner for Inner North London have expressed grave concern that increased bureaucracy and inflexible procedures has led to delays and reduced the quality of service to the public, especially those of the Jewish and Muslim faiths.

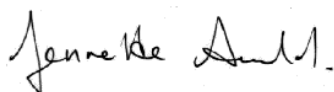
In addition, the close members of a Jewish family cannot begin the mourning process until after the funeral - known as "sitting shiva". As this does not commence until after the burial the family also suffers from any delay. Concerns have also been raised about insensitive rules imposed by the Coroner for Inner North London such as the refusal to permit the Jewish community to use private mortuaries to watch over and perform traditional cultural or religious practices until burial.

Whilst other coroner's offices, knowing of religious obligations for prompt burials, demonstrate flexibility wherever possible, the Senior Coroner for Inner North London has shown little regard for ethnic or religious sensitivities, and many of her imposed rules, bureaucracy, and unnecessary delays offend traditional and/or religious practices¹. This part of London is amongst the most diverse in the country. Ms Hassell's insensitive behaviour-probably unique in our local public services-flies in the face of harmonious community relations.

This Assembly welcomes the Mayor's comments, supporting the Jewish Board of Deputies in writing to the Lord Chancellor. This Assembly resolves to write to the Judicial Conduct Investigations Office, Lord Chancellor, Chief Coroner and Lord Chief Justice expressing our serious concern about the comments, decisions and actions of the coroner; and calls upon the Mayor to do the same."

I look forward to receiving your response to the motion at your earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely,



Jennette Arnold OBE AM
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¹ [Jewish leaders call for London coroner to be fired over burial delays](#), The Guardian, 19.01.2018
[Jewish leaders call on Inner North London coroner to quit](#), BBC, 19.01.2018
[Coroner criticised over Jewish and Muslim burials](#), ES, 12.01.2018