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## *Media Release*

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### **Government Must Provide Public Apology to Families Impacted by Coronial Project Inquiry Advert List**

Independent Member for Nelson Meg Webb today called on the State Government to issue a formal public apology to those Tasmanians who discovered via a newspaper advert published on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January, that a deceased family member was included in the controversial Radda Pathology Museum autopsy sample collection.

The Coroner's Office was advised in 2016 by the University of Tasmania that its R.A. Radda Museum of Pathology held an historic collection of autopsy sample body parts, some of which may have been taken without permission, and is now investigating the matter.

"The first many people knew their deceased loved one had been subject to the controversial autopsy specimen collection of the Radda Pathology Museum was when they became aware of the list of names published in the weekend newspapers last month," Ms Webb said.

"It is beyond cruel for people to discover this confronting and shocking treatment of their child, parent, sibling or spouse by reading their name in a newspaper advert.

"I am aware of more than one instance where people discovered their family member was on this list only because someone else had seen the advert and then mentioned it to them.

"How is that acceptable?

"Despite the authorities knowing since 2016 of the collection's existence, the apparent failure to prioritise the development of a rigorous and effective trauma-informed approach for this crucial stage of the Coronial Project inquiry has further let down those already reeling from the discovery of a shocking breach of trust.

"It is now incumbent on the Rockliff government to provide an unequivocal public apology to all those affected for the additional and unnecessary pain caused by this failure.

"Since the publication of the list of names my office has received numerous contacts from distressed and angry people querying what, if any, effort had been made to contact them privately to break this traumatic news.

"There are genuine questions to be answered here. How is it family members sharing an uncommon surname, or descendants living in the deceased's former home the address for which was included in the published advert, could not be identified and contacted privately despite staff apparently working for months to identify next of kin?"

Ms Webb said people had raised with her a range of additional concerns including:

- Whether families will have a say in the fate of their relatives body part;
- Assumptions that the eldest next of kin is authorised to represent other affected family members, and lack of flexibility around including other siblings for example;
- Process is highly bureaucratic with little human contact or trauma support;
- Assumptions regarding literacy and technological capacity of affected family members required to provide electronic proof of identity documents;
- Absence of senior officials, such as the Coroner, with specific queries delayed until their return.

Ms Webb also called for an urgent commitment that current family members would be consulted on appropriate options regarding the fate of their relative's partial remains.

"Some people have raised with me their alarm over indications they have received that once identified their relative's remains will be destroyed, which would contravene either their religious beliefs or those of the deceased," Ms Webb said.

"Distressed family members should not be presented with a fait accompli regarding the fate of their relative's remains, instead they must be consulted over their preference.

"Routine bureaucratic processes and blanket public communications are inappropriate for such an extraordinary and sensitive situation.

"Nobody is disputing the Coroner's Office has a difficult task ahead investigating this awful historic situation, but it has not got off to a good start.

"An immediate and unequivocal apology by the government for current harm inflicted would provide an important acknowledgement of the failure of relevant authorities to use the last eight years to develop an effective trauma informed and compassionate plan," Ms Webb said.

**Attached:** Copy of letter Ms Webb sent to the Attorney General and Minister for Justice, 31 January 2025.

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