

Union: Guards overwhelmed

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Quebec prison guards are overwhelmed as they struggle to deal with mental health issues among inmates, according to their union president. "We live these problems every day," Stephane Lemaire said, a day after Kathrine Dufresne hanged herself inside the Hull Detention Centre. Awaiting trial.

Dufresne, 53, was in jail awaiting trial on a first-degree murder charge for the Oct. 22 strangulation of her daughter, Sophie Fitzpatrick, 7.

"People with mental health problems find themselves in our prisons because the hospitals don't keep them anymore. We're overpopulated." said Lemaire. "We always find (cases like Dufresne's) devastating. The guard who intervened -- she's very upset, that's the second time that's happened to her."

He said it's a question of resources and better design: The province needs to reduce overpopulation and construct prisons more like hospitals.

"It's all well to keep them (behind bars), but they're going to return to society. Our prisons in Quebec aren't adapted," he said.

"In Hull, there's just one cell equipped with a camera to monitor people who are suicidal."

Dufresne wasn't in it. "It's not normal that there's just one (of these cells). It's not normal also that (Dufresne) wasn't transferred right away to Montreal because there's a shortage of staff," Lemaire said.

Dufresne was the second high profile murder suspect in Quebec to commit suicide this week while awaiting trial.

Paul Laplante, charged in the murder of his wife after she went missing from a Quebec shopping plaza four years ago, hanged himself in his cell at the Rivieres-des-Prairies detention centre in Montreal Monday.