

4 March 2026

Sent by email

Dear Mr Richardson

Inquest: George Michael Monte De Ramos Castrudes - Report to prevent future deaths

I am writing to you in your capacity as President of the Jersey Farmers' Union in respect of an inquest that I presided over from 24 to 27 February 2026, in relation to the death of George Michael Monte De Ramos Castrudes (**George**). George worked at La Valette Nurseries, a farm in Grouville, as a temporary seasonal agricultural worker. A detailed speaking note setting out my findings and addressing the contribution made to the cause of his death by a mixture of factors is provided together with this letter.

In brief, the inquest found that the cause of George's death on 23 January 2025 was the hypoxic brain Injury that he suffered as a result of carbon monoxide poisoning. The fire in the portacabin that George lived in, which caused the carbon monoxide poisoning, was started by George in a makeshift fire pit that he was using as a source of heating on a night when temperatures had dropped to 0.3 degrees outside.

At the inquest I found that the inherent challenges with heating a portacabin, combined with George's concerns about the financial cost, contributed to his decision to light the firepit. I also found that the absence of a working smoke detector in the portacabin meant that any opportunity there may have been to rescue George before he was fatally injured was lost.

Coroner's legal powers and public interest

One of the ways in which an inquest can serve the public interest is by drawing attention to the existence of circumstances which, if left unremedied, might lead to further deaths. To that end, Rule 12 of the Inquest and Post-mortem Examinations (Jersey) Law 1995, permits me to report matters to the relevant person or authority with a view to preventing the recurrence of fatalities like that in question at the inquest.



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At the conclusion of the inquest into George's death, I announced that I would be writing a report to prevent future deaths addressed to you, to the Minister for Home Affairs and to the Minister for Environment as I believe that you collectively have the ability to address the issues raised by this report. I have, therefore, also written in the same terms to the Minister for Home Affairs and the Minister for Environment.

Coroner's concerns and recommendations

During the evidence at the inquest we heard from Mr Cragg, who is an Environmental Health Officer and the Regulation Standards Manager of the Housing and Nuisance Team.

He explained that George's accommodation is a rented dwelling within the definition in Article 2 of the Public Health and Safety (Rented Dwellings) (Jersey) Law 2018 (the "**2018 Law**") and that, from 1 May 2024, it was required to be licenced under the Public Health and Safety (Rented Dwellings) (Licensing) (Jersey) Regulations 2023 (the "**2023 Regulations**"). An application was made for George's accommodation to be licenced, and a licence was issued on 10 July 2024.

The licence was issued under a transitional provision in Regulation 7 of the 2023 Regulations. That Regulation disapplied certain of the offences in the 2018 Law for a two-year period up to the end of April 2026, including the offence that may, among other things, have been applicable where a landlord fails to install or maintain a working smoke detector within a rented dwelling. Pursuant to Regulation 7(2)(b) of the 2023 Regulations, the Minister was also not entitled to inspect a dwelling before issuing a licence under the transitional provision.

The portacabin on La Valette Farm, and any similar portacabins on other farms will not therefore have been inspected by the Housing and Nuisance Team, which carries out inspections under the 2018 Law, prior to a licence being issued under that Law.

Of the 18,759 active licences issued by the Housing and Nuisance Team under the 2018 Law, approximately 17,500 are subject to the transitional provision. Mr Cragg subsequently confirmed that his team of eight officers in the Housing and Nuisance Team has carried out 807 inspections of rented dwellings since the 2018 Law came into effect, with most of those inspections being of new rental properties, but with some being triggered by complaints about the quality of accommodation. However, the Housing and Nuisance Team does not collect information about the nature of the rented dwellings that



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were licenced under the transitional provision. Therefore, he could not determine how many of these dwellings are portacabins.

Mr Cragg was asked to provide his professional opinion of George's portacabin prior to the fire and whether regulatory action may have been taken if a complaint had of been made. Based on the information available from the Fire Investigation Report, Mr Cragg's evidence was that the sources of heating with the property were insufficient to keep the property warm. While it was not possible for him to assess the thermal properties of the insulation of the portacabin with certainty, he reached the view that it was highly unlikely that the portacabin would have been considered a habitable temperature on the night of the fire. The combination of a lack of heating and the thermal properties of the cabin, compounded by George becoming the sole occupant of the portacabin shortly before the fire, would in his opinion have created a Category 1 Hazard of Excess Cold as identified in the Housing and Safety Rating System and the Code of Practice for Rented Dwellings. Low indoor temperatures are recognised in the Code of Practice as having a range of significant negative health risks, including the risk of causing pneumonia or hypothermia.

Mr Cragg explained when giving evidence that he had inspected a small number of similar portacabins in response to complaints and had found the same hazard to be present. He said that in at least one such case the regulatory response had been to issue a prohibition notice under Article 9 of the 2018 Law, which would prevent the portacabin from being used as accommodation unless action was taken to remove the hazard or reduce it to an acceptable level.

During his evidence, Mr Allan who is a Senior Manager in the Jersey Customs and Immigration Service (JCIS) confirmed that the application form for a work permit collects information about the deductions that an employer may make for the cost of housing, but does not require the employer to specify the type of accommodation that will be provided to their migrant employee. He could not therefore determine how many of the 300 temporary agricultural workers in Jersey were living in portacabins.

During her evidence Mrs Rueb, who is the Executive Secretary of the Jersey Farmers Union, confirmed that she was also unable to provide a figure for the number of portacabins in use as staff accommodation for temporary agricultural workers.

While there are routes to complain about staff accommodation available to migrant workers, and a complaint might trigger an inspection by the Housing and Nuisance Team, there have been very few complaints to that team or to JCIS. I consider that there is a risk that migrant workers, particularly those working in low paid jobs on temporary work



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permits, will be slow to raise complaints about the quality of their staff accommodation for fear of prejudicing their future employment.

To prevent future deaths, I recommend that the Jersey Farmers Union, the Minister for Home Affairs and the Minister for Environment carry out further work to identify the instances where portacabins are being used as staff accommodation during the winter months and to proactively assess whether these cabins meet the requirements of the Public Health and Safety (Rented Dwellings) Law 2018.

Yours sincerely,

Advocate Matt Berry

Deputy Viscount