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Concern at 'similarity' in deaths of witnesses

(Barry McCaffrey, [Irish News](#))

A leading human rights group last night (Wednesday) raised concerns that two key witnesses in the events surrounding the murder of LVF leader Billy Wright were both found dead in similar circumstances inside Maghaberry prison.

Former INLA prisoner John Kenneway will be buried from his home in west Belfast this morning.

The Kenneway family had initially been refused permission to have a second postmortem examination on the body but that decision was overruled yesterday morning.

The 45-year-old was found dead in his cell at Maghaberry prison on Friday evening.

Kenneway was one of three INLA men convicted of murdering Billy Wright as he sat on a prison bus inside the Maze Prison in December 1997.

Although he was convicted of the murder the fatal shots had been fired by the other gang members.

Kenneway was released in October 2000 under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement.

However, in February this year he was returned to prison after being charged with making threats to kill, assaulting police and drink driving.

He had been refused compassionate parole to attend a grandchild's christening days before his death.

The former INLA man had not given evidence to the Wright Inquiry before his death.

The Kenneway family asked for a second postmortem examination over concerns about the circumstances surrounding the death.

Kenneway is understood to have been found lying on the floor of his cell with a ligature around his neck.

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In June 2002 LVF leader Mark Fulton was found dead inside Maghaberry prison.

Fulton was found to have taken his own life by strangling himself with a belt while lying on a bed.

As a key confidant of Wright, Fulton would have been a key witness at any inquiry into his death.

An inquest into Fulton's death ruled out foul play but criticised prison warders' failure to record previous attempts he had made to take his own life as a "serious omission".

Coroner John Leckey called for the retraining of prison staff after the death.

British/Irish Rights Watch spokeswoman Jane Winter last night expressed concern over the similarities in the deaths of Kenneway and another Fulton.

"I think there are grounds for concern that two of the potentially most important witnesses who could have given evidence at the Wright Inquiry were found dead in very similar circumstances inside Maghaberry prison," she said.

Solicitor Kevin Winters said the Kenneway family would now await the separate outcomes of the Prison Ombudsman and PSNI investigations into his death.

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