

Judge sends senior to Health Department

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A 70-year-old woman accused of arson was ordered straight from court Tuesday to the Department of Health.

Jean Roberts arrived at the office on Hollis Street in Halifax under sherrifs' escort.

"I'm uncertain as to what the long-term solution will be for Ms. Roberts," Health Minister Chris d'Entremont told reporters.

Roberts suffers from Parkinson's disease and has a history of mental illness. She's spent months in and out of court on various charges.

At a bail hearing Tuesday, provincial court Judge Bill MacDonald released Roberts from custody until her trial on the arson charge, along with other charges. But because she has no place to go, he ordered sheriffs to take her directly to the Health Department.

Defence lawyer Geoff Newton agreed it was the best solution, saying the criminal justice system is not the appropriate place for Roberts.

Release opposed

But Crown attorney Bob Morrison said Roberts is a danger to the public and opposed her release.

Roberts' troubles with the law began about a year ago when she assaulted a fellow patient at the Nova Scotia Hospital.

In June, she allegedly set fire to her Dartmouth apartment, which Community Services provided for her.

No institution would take Roberts after she was charged with arson.

Now with the court's initiative, health officials have provided her with nursing-home care.

Mental-health groups are lobbying for the province to build secure housing for seniors like Roberts, but they say that's months or even years away.