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For Immediate Release  
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Ottawa, Ontario

*Re: Alarming Infection Rates at Joliette Institution for Women*

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**For over 40 years the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) has been advocating with and for federally incarcerated women. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this work has become even more urgent and necessary.**

**CAEFS is regularly in contact with incarcerated women.** During the COVID-19 crisis, our six Regional Advocacy teams across the country, along with our National Office, have each been receiving **dozens of phone calls a day** from incarcerated women reporting on their conditions of confinement and seeking our advocacy support. **This means that we have detailed and up-to-date information from those who are most impacted by the spread of COVID-19 in prisons.**

**The reports that we receive from people incarcerated in federal women's prisons are what guide our advocacy efforts as we work on both systemic and individual remedies.**

We are raising the alarm about the rate of infection in Joliette Institution for women. The situation there is dire and swift action needs to be taken. On April 7th there were 10 confirmed cases of COVID-19, now there are 50. While the rated capacity of Joliette is 132, there are currently approximately 80 people incarcerated inside - this means that **over 60% of prisoners at Joliette have been infected with COVID-19.** In fact, these number are likely higher given delays in test results.

The example that Joliette is so sadly demonstrating is that by the very nature of prisons (lack of hygienic environment, impossible to physically distance), once COVID-19 enters into a prison, it is extremely difficult - if not impossible - to stop its rapid spread. This puts an already vulnerable population at even more risk.

We have been told that **the Structured Intervention Units (SIU) in Joliette have been used to isolate prisoners who are ill.** SIUs are what once were called 'segregation units', which is extremely troubling as this means confining people who are sick in ways that are cruel and

punishing. This kind of response to managing an infection lacks humanity and any form of dignity. It has also, clearly, proven ineffective in containing the spread.

The Grand Valley Institution for Women currently has 9 confirmed cases and, yesterday, the Fraser Valley Institution for Women reported their first confirmed case of COVID-19. **Joliette is an example of where these other institutions may be in a short time.**

In most cases, we have been told by prisoners that CSC continues to **only test individuals who are symptomatic**, which ignores what we know from public health officials about the possibility of asymptomatic carriers.

“CAEFS, along with many others - including doctors, lawyers, other advocacy organizations, and prisoners themselves - have been saying that prisons are dangerous, especially during a pandemic. **We have been speaking out about the danger of COVID-19 and demanding immediate and swift action in the federal prison system for weeks.** If our calls had been heeded a month ago, this outbreak in Joliette may have been avoided.” Emilie Coyle, Executive Director of CAEFS

**All responses to COVID-19 must be grounded in compassion, dignity, and the preservation of human health and life.** We need immediate action and the safe release of as many people as possible.

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For more information, or for comment, please contact CAEFS Executive Director, Emilie Coyle.

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