



For Immediate Release
May 7th 2020

Re: Former Correctional Officer at the Nova Institution for Women Arrested on Charges of Sexual Assault Against Prisoners

Today, The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) - along with the Atlantic Elizabeth Fry Societies - have learned that a former Correctional Officer at the Nova Institution for Women was arrested and charged with 6 counts of sexual assault, 6 counts of breach of trust, and 1 count of trying to procure sexual service - all related to his work at the Institution. This arrest comes over a year after multiple prisoners at the Nova Institution for Women came forward to tell their experiences of being sexually assaulted by this Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) Correctional Officer.

A year ago, these women filed a lawsuit, with the support of the Atlantic Elizabeth Fry Societies seeking justice for themselves, but also change for all incarcerated women.

Emma Halpern, Executive Director of the Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia, states: "The women who launched these lawsuits suffered egregious harm at the hands of a predator who operated without reprisal, for many years, within one of our government institutions. These women reported the abuse to authorities at Nova and were ignored, transferred and made to apologize for the harms perpetrated against them. This is a clear example of the way prisons fail to keep women safe and highlights the need for women to be out of prison and receiving supportive programs in community."

Prisons are not – and never will be – safe places, as by their very nature, prisons are violent and oppressive institutions. For years, CAEFS has been calling attention to how the power structures inherent to the prisons make those held inside incredibly vulnerable to abuse by CSC employees. This is particularly concerning for incarcerated women as most of them have experienced abuse prior to their prison sentence, including sexual abuse, and have extensive histories of trauma which is further perpetuated through their experience of incarceration. A clear example of this - and one that CAEFS has repeatedly advocated against – is CSC's policy of routine strip searches, which is a form of state sanctioned sexual violence.

The sexual abuse experienced by the women who have come forward from the Nova Institution for Women is egregious. Now, during the COVID-19 crisis, with visits prohibited and significantly reduced access to external accountability mechanisms, there is less oversight than ever within CSC institutions, making prisoners even more vulnerable to all forms of abuse.

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“Eliminating strip searching; ensuring that incarcerated people can readily access external counselling and treatment options for trauma and abuse; an increase in oversight and accountability mechanisms of and for CSC - all these should be implemented immediately; however, reforming a violent system can only take us so far in preventing the abuse of vulnerable women. Rather than incarcerating women, we need to invest in building safe and supportive communities” - Emilie Coyle, Executive Director of CAEFS

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For comments:

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