![CAEFS logo — Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies]

May 22nd 2020

Statement on Policing the Pandemic

We have received disturbing reports from CAEFS' local member societies of an increase in punitive law enforcement for supposed failures to adhere to physical distancing guidelines. This expansion of police power to serve COVID-19 related fines and /or to detain people is harming and further criminalizing already marginalized – often poor— communities, many of whom are the least able to practice the physical distancing measures that are being suggested.

Responding from a place of punishment, rather than addressing need fails to consider the unfairness of the instructions to 'stay at home'… and if home means no access to outdoor space? If home is a shelter that you are told to leave during the day?

Fining hundreds of dollars to those who cannot afford to pay, in a time when money is already more scarce than usual - or confining people in close quarters as a punishment for not being far enough apart – will not lessen the impact of COVID-19, and will only serve to exacerbate the existing issues of inequity. Policing cannot be the way to respond to a public health crisis, and it never has been.

In addition, we must recognize that racialized communities are already disproportionately surveilled by law enforcement. When a community is already under surveillance, any perceived infraction is more likely to be noted and acted upon resulting in an excessive and unequal number of fines issued and/or people detained.

A response that fails to account for inequities is bound to leave us with an 'equal' rather than an equitable result. A response that is rooted in punishment, will do little to keep us safe. We need guidelines that are rooted in dignity, humanity, and mutual care.

In order to keep each other safe from COVID-19, we need to invest in our communities and look out for one another, rather than relying on systems of punishment.

For more on policing the pandemic, check out:

Updates from **the CCLA** and the **Policing the Pandemic Mapping Project.**