



Statement on the Office of the Correctional Investigator's Third COVID-19 Report

OTTAWA, Ontario (February 23rd, 2021) Today, the Office of the Correctional Investigator released their third public report on the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on federal corrections. The findings in this report mirror many of the issues that CAEFS has observed over the past year through our own monitoring of the conditions of confinement in the federal institutions designated for women.

The OCI has highlighted three recommendations to address the issues identified in their report, namely:

- (1) That CSC develop and fund a plan that significantly shifts program access and delivery to the community rather than prison – recognizing that programs delivered in the community yield better outcomes than those delivered in prison.
- (2) That CSC collaborate with the Parole Board of Canada on early and prioritized release of elderly and medically compromised inmates who pose no undue risk to society.
- (3) That the Minister of Public Safety examine alternatives to incarceration noting that even beyond the impacts of COVID-19, “a more rigorous, humane and cost-effective community-based approach to corrections is long over-due” and that “the timing is now to reallocate staff and resources to better support safe, timely and healthy community reintegration and to examine the gradual closing of some aging and antiquated penitentiaries”.

CAEFS supports these recommendations as they align with our long-held position that prisons are ineffective and harmful. COVID-19 has exacerbated many of the existing inequities and rights violations that have always permeated Canadian federal prisons.

CAEFS has called on the government numerous times since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to act to protect the safety and wellbeing of all of us, including those who are incarcerated. We draw attention to our January 20th 2021 open letter to Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, the Commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada, and the Chairperson of the Parole Board of Canada – cosigned by a national coalition of researchers, advocates, service providers, and legal professionals – to which we have yet to receive a response.

While it is not one of the highlighted recommendations, we also call attention to the disturbing finding in this OCI report that Indigenous people have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 in federal prisons and have been underserved by CSC's response. As the OCI notes, Indigenous people accounted for nearly half of all cases of COVID-19 in federal prisons. Furthermore, the OCI states that incarcerated non-Indigenous population declined



at twice the rate of the Indigenous inmate population. We amplify the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action 30 that "calls on the government to commit to eliminating the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in custody", as well the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' Calls to Justice 5.20 and 5.21 that call on the government to implement the Indigenous-specific provisions of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and to reduce the gross overrepresentation of Indigenous women and girls in the criminal justice system.

Limiting the spread of COVID-19 in prisons must not undermine safe conditions of confinement, dignity, or timely reintegration. We need to protect the health and lives of prisoners— because it is what is legally obligated and because it is right.

We look forward to the government's response both to this report and to our open letter.

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