



NEWS RELEASE

New Report: Reproductive (In)Justice in Canadian Federal Prisons for Women

OTTAWA, ONTARIO (February 8th, 2021): A new report by Martha Paynter and published by the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) describes how federal incarceration impedes reproductive justice by restricting access to health services and by destroying family connections - this is especially true for Indigenous prisoners. CAEFS is an organization dedicated to defending the rights of incarcerated women, trans, non-binary, and Two Spirit prisoners and working towards a world without prisons.

The report is informed by a series of Reproductive Justice workshops offered to people in 5 of the 6 prisons designated for women in late 2019 and early 2020 by the report's author. Workshops were delivered with the collaboration of Indigenous Elders at each institution and with the support of CAEFS' regional advocates. What was learned in the workshops, and made clear in the report, is that the reproductive health of incarcerated women, trans, non-binary, and Two Spirit people in Canada is threatened by the very nature of their incarceration - but that there is tremendous resilience and resistance amongst this population of people too... to live, to parent, to thrive.

"This project, involving conversations with 200 people in prisons for women, showed us just how detrimental incarceration was not only to reproductive health, but to health, period. We did this work before COVID-19 caused outbreaks in prisons across the country, and further degraded the untenable conditions people were already enduring. We cannot continue in a world where we turn to prison to solve our problems because it only makes things worse." – Martha Paynter

The workshops began in response to the findings of the External Review of Tubal Ligation in the Saskatoon Health Region, led by Dr. Yvonne Boyer and Dr. Judith Bartlett, which in turn was prompted by the 2015 media report regarding the forced sterilization of Indigenous women in the Saskatoon Health Region. Boyer and Bartlett interviewed seven women who bravely came forward for their review. Over 100 women have joined in class action lawsuits for damages stemming from the experience across several provinces. Recognizing that people who are incarcerated may not have known about or had access to communication pathways to contribute to their inquiry, Senator Boyer supported the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) to engage with currently incarcerated people in federal prisons for women to discuss sterilization and other reproductive health and justice issues.

"There is a large gap in what we know of forced and coerced sterilization in the prison system - we know the areas in Canada where there are greater concentrations of Indigenous women, the rates of sterilization are also high.



Work should be done in the prison system to educate women on their reproductive and human rights and bring awareness to these issues so they may be acknowledged and stopped.” – Senator Yvonne Boyer

The report also includes recommendations for advocacy for the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies to advance reproductive health and justice.

“The lack of autonomy afforded to incarcerated women, trans, non-binary, and Two Spirit people to exercise their reproductive rights is a powerful reminder of how much more needs to be done. Using the recommendations from the report – and guidance from leaders in the reproductive justice movement – we will bolster our advocacy for change both at the institutional and legislative level to challenge the power structures that impede incarcerated people from achieving reproductive justice. As long as people are in prison, their reproductive rights are threatened.” – Emilie Coyle

On Friday, February 12th at 2:00pm EST CAEFS will be hosting a conversation on [YouTube](#) between Emilie Coyle, Martha Paynter, and Toni Sinclair (Executive Director, Elizabeth Fry Edmonton) to discuss the report’s findings and CAEFS’ advocacy strategy moving forward. As the rate of incarceration continues to rise for women, trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit people, one workshop participant reminds us that, “We need to be beating the drum louder”.

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