



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Groups: Canada must end “extreme”, prolonged solitary confinement

The Canadian Civil Liberties Association, John Howard Society Canada, the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, and Elizabeth Fry of Mainland Nova Scotia – along with Lisa Adams, a woman who spent sixteen days in a dry cell – are renewing demands for the government of Canada to end prolonged, unnecessary use of dry cells, an “extreme” form of solitary confinement.

WHAT ARE DRY CELLS?

Dry cells are an extreme form of solitary confinement,” said Abby Deshman, Director of the Criminal Justice Program with the Canadian Civil Liberties Association.

“Individuals subjected to this confinement are first strip searched, and then placed alone in a cell with lights constantly on, no flushing toilet, or running water. The prisoner is constantly watched through a window or security camera and staff are required to observe and document the entire time the prisoner is on the toilet and search every bowel movement for contraband.”

“The federal Correctional Investigator has called for a strict 72-hour limit on dry cell placements for over a decade. This summer we recommended concrete legal changes that would ensure an end to unnecessary, prolonged placement in dry cells. We are still waiting for these changes,” continued Deshman.

“In many cases these placements are unjustifiable or unnecessary. Simply put, keeping people in these conditions, for any significant length of time, is unconscionable.”

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA HAS ISSUED MINISTERIAL DIRECTIVE

Yesterday, the Minister of Public Safety [issued a Ministerial Directive](#) addressing dry cell use. The directive calls on CSC to respect existing provisions with direction around reporting requirements for Institutional heads. It does not, however, limit the length of time a person can be held in a dry cell. It also does not require authorities to agree to prisoners’ requests for a body scan or X-ray so they prove that they are not carrying any contraband.

The Minister of Public Safety has announced that they are also working on regulations. The regulations must proceed quickly with input from key stakeholders.

“In light of the significant harms dry cells cause by torturing people through constant exposure to light, lack of meaningful human contact, poor food quality, and extreme confinement, it is

encouraging that the federal government has recognized the dire necessity for change by issuing a ministerial directive,” said Emilie Coyle, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies. “It is unprecedented in that this is the first time that the Minister of Public Safety has issued a directive to the Correctional Service of Canada of this kind. We will continue to advocate so that this important precedent and attention will result in real and practical change for people in prison and ultimately an end to the egregious practice of dry cell.”

“Even after my successful constitutional challenge which forced the government to [change the law](#), in June, the government chose to amend the *Correctional and Conditional Release Act* in the narrowest way possible.” said Lisa Adams. “Prison staff are still able to put prisoners in dry cells for indefinite periods of time, for something as small as a suspected hidden cigarette. There is nothing in the dry cell provisions requiring prison staff to grant prisoners’ requests for an X-ray or body scan to show they are not hiding contraband.”

About the Canadian Civil Liberties Association

The CCLA is an independent, non-profit organization with supporters from across the country. Founded in 1964, the CCLA is a national human rights organization committed to defending the rights, dignity, safety, and freedoms of all people in Canada.

About the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies

The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) was established in 1978. Since its inception, CAEFS has worked to address the persistent ways in which women and gender-diverse people impacted by criminalization have been denied humanity and excluded from community. CAEFS advocacy utilizes a feminist rights-based approach that focuses on federally incarcerated women and gender-diverse people and upholds the mandates of several federal ministries by recognizing that, to create substantive equality, unique attention and approaches are needed to respond to incarcerated equity-deserving groups. CAEFS also represents the 24 self-governing Elizabeth Fry Societies located across the country, all of whom provide critical front-line services to women and gender-diverse people in their communities. In this way, CAEFS has a unique perspective that is equally informed by our work inside of the prisons designated for women and the community-based work of our membership.

For the Media

For further comments, please contact us at media@ccla.org.