



## For Immediate Release

### **Response to the 2022-2023 Annual Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator**

OTTAWA, Ontario (November 9, 2023) – The Canadian Association Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) commends the findings of the Correctional Investigators (OCI) 2022-2023 Annual Report, released on November 1st, 2023. We agree that we cannot ignore the glaring injustice of the ongoing mass incarceration of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

In the previous year's report, the OCI released the first update to "Spirit Matters: Aboriginal People and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act" since 2013. This year, they delivered the second installment, focusing on healing lodges, the Pathways initiatives, and the role and impact of Elders in federal corrections. Despite these continuous efforts, the alarm over Indigenous mass incarceration and the struggles faced by First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people seems to echo into a void.

The OCI conducted a deep-reaching investigation that included interviews with incarcerated Indigenous individuals, Elders working for the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), CSC staff, and healing lodge staff. The central message of their findings was clear: it's imperative to divest from the structures, practices, and beliefs that have not only imprisoned Indigenous people for extended periods but have obstructed genuine and substantial change.

The report's preamble reminds us that the OCI has been reporting on the challenges faced by incarcerated Indigenous people since 1973. "Fifty years is far too long to be reporting the same grievances. Over two generations of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people have suffered the failures of our prison system, their ongoing trauma exposed for the world to see, with little action taken," emphasized Emilie Coyle, Executive Director of CAEFS. The number of incarcerated Indigenous women has been the fastest-growing segment within the prison system over the past decade, reaching a disturbing 50%, despite Indigenous women comprising only 4% of the Canadian population. Coyle emphasized the urgency of pushing the government, legal system, and prison system to take immediate action to address this crisis.

The "Spirit Matters" report underscores the findings of the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (NIMMIWG), drawing a direct line between colonization and the criminalization of Indigenous women and outlining the necessary steps to address this atrocity. The OCI also calls upon the government to act on several recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) report from 2015. Unfortunately, these repeated calls for changes to our carceral system have not resulted in meaningful action.

This year's annual report also features thematic investigations and updates on ongoing national inquiries, aligning with CAEFS' unyielding advocacy efforts. These encompass grim concerns regarding Dry Cells, the exorbitant cost of living within federal prisons, the urgent need for patient advocacy, the review of the gender diversity policy, the distressing lack of meaningful options for women and gender-diverse individuals within the minimum units designated for women, and the disconcerting issue of non-natural deaths in custody.

CAEFS monitors the conditions of confinement in federal prisons designated for women on a monthly basis and compiles records outlining the systemic issues. These records reveal that the issues flagged in this year's OCI annual report persist, with minimal progress. Federally incarcerated women and gender-diverse individuals continue to face daunting obstacles when seeking redress for the challenges they endure. Emilie Coyle explained, "Our teams have been working with federally incarcerated women and gender-diverse individuals to tackle issues such as the restrictive practices in the minimum units—cohort use, isolation, limited movement hours, enhanced surveillance, and a glaring absence of meaningful programs, for example. As long as these types of violations persist, we will unwaveringly work to uphold the human rights of federally incarcerated women and gender-diverse individuals."

In light of the findings of this annual report and previous annual reports, CAEFS continues to advocate for proactive community investments aimed at preventing criminalization and incarceration. Furthermore, we emphatically stress the urgency of promptly implementing the recommendations and findings from the OCI, NIMMIWG, TRC, and other commissions and task forces. These actions are essential in our pursuit of the transformative outcomes that our systems and communities so desperately need.

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**For Comment**

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