



Lilian Kordic
Edmonton Institution for Women
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Sent via email.

February 3rd, 2025

Dear Lil,

I want to thank the institutional management team (“IMT”) at the Edmonton Institution for Women (EIFW) for taking the time to meet with myself and a volunteer for our regional advocacy team on January 23rd, 2025, in person at EIFW.

This letter summarizes reports received and conditions observed during our visit to the Edmonton Institution for Women from January 21st through 23rd as well as summaries of the discussion between the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) and members of IMT following the visit, the relevant laws and policies, and CAEFS’ recommendations.

We look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'J. Omstead'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jacqueline Omstead
Senior Advocate

Request Forms

Description: CAEFS received reports that request forms are not being provided with carbon copies, which makes tracking requests and responses very challenging for incarcerated people. People reported that staff often say no to providing photocopies, when people ask for this in lieu of carbon copies. This has been reported as being especially challenging for people in the maximum-security unit, where people also reported that their request forms are often not responded to within the prescribed timeframes (15 business days to respond) or also, that they reportedly go missing entirely.

Discussion: The IMT shared that they had been made aware of this issue in the past and have since ordered request forms. They shared that any request forms that do not include a carbon copy are from prior to that time. The IMT shared that they will ensure that these forms are replaced.

Law & Policy:

CCRA s.91: Every [incarcerated person] shall have complete access to the [CSC] grievance procedure without negative consequences.

CAEFS Recommendations: CAEFS appreciates EIFW's attention to this matter or work to resolve it. Request forms are essential to effectively navigating life within a penitentiary, and are frequently cited in law and policy as the method by which incarcerated people should communicate with staff. Critically, request forms support incarcerated people to maintain written records in an officially recognized and time-framed way that supports fair correctional decision making. CAEFS recommends that EIFW continues to work to ensure that triplicate request forms are accessible to all incarcerated people without restrictions and are responded to within prescribed timeframes.

Safety of Beds in Maximum-Security Unit

Description: CAEFS received reports that there are no ladders on the bunk beds in the maximum-security unit. As a result, people have explained to us that they are required to use the window ledge and chair to climb in and out of their bed which is dangerous. CAEFS brought forward an example that was reported during our visit whereby someone tried to climb down from her bed by standing on a chair. The chair slipped and she fell, hitting her face, causing her lip to bleed, her tooth to become loose, and pain through her cheek.

Discussion: The IMT shared that this is not unique to EIFW, but that they will look into it. They theorized that the absence of ladders may be because they are a "suspension point."

Law & Policy:

CCRA s. 70: The Service shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that penitentiaries, the penitentiary environment, the living and working conditions of [incarcerated people] and the working conditions of staff members are safe, healthful and free of practices that undermine a person's sense of personal dignity.

CD 550 s. 7: Population management strategies must include single occupancy when feasible and ensure that double bunking remains a temporary accommodation measure.

CAEFS' Recommendations: CAEFS encourages CSC to broaden its application of Creating Choices philosophies of empowerment, support, and person-centered care in its administration of the material conditions of incarceration. While these units exist, CAEFS recommends an end to the practice of double bunking in maximum-security units. If single occupancy is not feasible, the installation of ladders would contribute to a safer living environment for people incarcerated in the maximum-security units and would help to mitigate further injury.



Access to Family

Residential Mother-Child Program: People have reported concerns that there is no mother-child unit for people who are classified as medium-security. As such there is reportedly no option at EIFW for people who are classified as medium security to maintain full parenting responsibilities and keep their children with them, full or part-time.

Private Family Visits (PFV): Reports that there are limited other options to have meaningful access to children and family because the PFV is not being used for private family visits, and has not been for several years. An initial level grievance from early in 2024 on this issue, which was upheld in part, was shared with CAEFS.

Discussion:

- The IMT shared that building additional PFV units is part of the early stages of EIFW's master plan because it is recognized as a need but were not able to share more specific timelines.
- The IMT shared that making a mother-child unit available in general population is also part of the master plan for the site, but that currently giving a room to a child would result in one less bed space for an incarcerated person, and that EIFW is full.
- The IMT shared that part-time participating in the residential mother-child program is facilitated through visits in the V&C area.

Law & Policy:

CCRA s. 71(1) In order to promote relationships between [incarcerated people] and the community, an [incarcerated person] is entitled to have reasonable contact, including visits and correspondence, with family, friends and other persons from outside the penitentiary, subject to such reasonable limits as are prescribed for protecting the security of the penitentiary or the safety of persons.

CD 768, The purpose of the Institutional Mother-child program is: To foster positive relationships between federally incarcerated mothers and their child, by keeping them together where appropriate, and providing a supportive environment that promotes stability and continuity for the mother-child relationship.

CAEFS' Recommendations: The salient criteria in the regionalization of the Canadian penitentiaries designated from women was the promote close community and familial contact for federally sentenced women and gender-diverse people. Private family visiting units are a core component of people's access to family and use of them must be reinstated, especially given that most incarcerated people in EIFW are Indigenous and CSC has even stronger obligations to facilitate access to family for Indigenous federally sentenced people. All CSC decisions should be made in the spirit of facilitating the most broad and accessible access to community and family as possible.

Isolation Following Birth for Indigenous Woman

Description: CAEFS raised an individual case, with that individual's signed consent. This individual is Indigenous. This individual was working toward minimum security while she was pregnant, with the intention of keeping her child with her and preserve her parenting responsibilities. She reported that EIFW was working with her to this end, however prior to giving birth an "offender security level" (OSL) was completed and her minimum was denied, reportedly based on incident related to suboxone. She was maintained at the medium-security level. As a result, there was no option for her to keep her child with her at EIFW. This resulted in her having to relinquish parenting responsibility to a friend, who has only brought her child to visit her once.

Following the birth of her child (via cesarian section) she returned to EIFW and reported being placed in the private family visiting unit (PFV) alone. She shared with CAEFS that she was supposed to have mental health supports, including someone



to come check on her, but that this did not happen. When she did raise that she was feeling isolated, she shared that a peer was permitted to stay with overnight for one night. She remained in the PFV, alone, for a week.

Further, the day after giving birth she shared that she went to health care. She reports that she was not seen and that she was told to return the following day. She shared that did not have access to the right medication or wound care, but that health care told her that she should be fine with Tylenol. She shared that she was in tremendous pain. She described her post-partum experience as “basically solitary confinement” and as traumatizing, dehumanizing, and leading her to experiencing thoughts of suicide. She reports that she submitted a grievance around this time but that it was not responded to.

Discussion:

- CAEFS raised this case, in part, as an example of the impacts of not having a mother-child unit available to people in the general population.
- The IMT reported that the individual was likely placed in the PFV prior to her giving birth for security-related incident and described her as a possible “aggressor”. It was also noted by the IMT that this individual had a pattern of missing medical appointments prior to giving birth.
- The IMT shared that the PFV is treated like any other living unit, and so staff would be making rounds every two hours and that the individual therefore had avenues of communication available to her to raise her concerns.
- Health care noted that it is not their practice to visit individuals in the living unit, but that they attend in person. CAEFS raised that this would perhaps have been a barrier, given that she had recently given birth.
- The IMT shared that staff at EIFW are sensitive to the needs of people who are pregnant or have recently given birth, but understood the individual’s perspective, and offered to look into her placement in the PFV and her grievance.

Law & Policy:

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, s. 12: Everyone has the right not to be subjected to any cruel and unusual treatment or punishment.

UNDRIP, Article 22.2. States shall take measures, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination.

CCRA s. 4(g): correctional policies, programs and practices respect gender, ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic differences, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, and are responsive to the special needs of women, Indigenous persons, visible minorities, persons requiring mental health care and other groups.

CCRA s. 86 (1) The Service shall provide every [incarcerated person] with (a) essential health care; and (b) reasonable access to non-essential health care.

The Bangkok Rules, Rule 48: The medical and nutritional needs of women prisoners who have recently given birth, but whose babies are not with them in prison, shall be included in treatment programmes.

CAEFS’ Recommendations: The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) must ensure that individuals who have recently given birth are treated with dignity and specialized care. This includes access to adequate medical care, mental health support, and culturally appropriate services.

Attention must be given to the special needs of Indigenous mothers who are disproportionately impacted by the systemic inequities of colonialism and the traumatic effects of separation from their children. The separation of Indigenous mothers from their children as a direct result of decisions made by the federal government (in this case, not prioritizing access to full-time residency for people classified at the medium security level) is a perpetuation of cycles of colonial harm and undermines the government’s reconciliation efforts. Every effort should be made to ensure that all mothers, and especially Indigenous mothers, are able to maintain parenting responsibilities and reside with their children.



Phone Access in the Minimum-Security Unit

Description: People in the MSU report that there are only 2 phones available to people incarcerated in the MSU. As a result, people reported challenges in maintaining contact with family and community supports, planning for release, and connecting with legal counsel. CAEFS learned that access to the phones in the MSU are far less than in all other areas of the institution.

Discussion:

- The IMT shared that this has been raised with the Women Offenders Sector (WOS), but that they are limited by the “tech criteria”.
- The IMT shared that there is an option to undertake the project, but that it is not a priority in the master plan.
- The IMT noted that other avenues to manage phone access in the MSU have been attempted, like a sign-up sheet, but that this was not effective.
- The IMT shared that the standalone video station is also available for use for video visits.
- The IMT emphasized that legal calls are facilitated separately and in a private room.

Law & Policy:

CCRA s. 71(1) In order to promote relationships between [incarcerated people] and the community, an [incarcerated person] is entitled to have reasonable contact, including visits and correspondence, with family, friends and other persons from outside the penitentiary, subject to such reasonable limits as are prescribed for protecting the security of the penitentiary or the safety of persons.

CD 085s. 15: Access to telephones, through an inmate telephone system, should be provided, on a fair and consistent basis, to help maintain family and community ties and to provide a direct link with families in the event of an emergency.

CCRA s. 4(g): correctional policies, programs and practices respect gender, ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic differences, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, and are responsive to the special needs of women, Indigenous persons, visible minorities, persons requiring mental health care and other groups.

CAEFS’ Recommendations: To facilitate fair and consistent access to telephones CAEFS recommends that phones be installed in each of the MSU pods at EIFW. Many people at the MSU are preparing for imminent release back into community, ensuring that they have access to family and community supports is therefore especially critical to help facilitate successful reintegration and release planning.

Specific CSC Programming for Transwomen and People Assigned Male at Birth

Description: CAEFS received reports that there is specific core programming for transwomen. Further, it was reported to CAEFS that transwoman (and other people assigned male at birth) would be required take this new program even if they had previously completed other core programming at a prison designated for women. It was reported to CAEFS that there were concerns that this would adversely impact effected people who were approaching their parole eligibility dates or who already had scheduled hearings in front of the Parole Board of Canada.

Discussion:

- The IMT shared that this is a national directive impacting people who would have been required to take the Women Sex Offender Program.
- The IMT shared that they are currently unable to offer the program because this new program would require that staff be trained to facilitate a new program.



- The IMT shared that this is currently only impacting one person at EIFW and that options are being explored to facilitate access to the program, including collaborating with other sites to offer the program virtually.
- CAEFS raised that this person reports that she does not identify as a transwoman, though she has in the past, but as non-binary. It was unclear how this could or would be addressed in programming.

Law & Policy:

CHRA s. 3 (1) For all purposes of this Act, the prohibited grounds of discrimination are race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics, disability and conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted or in respect of which a record suspension has been ordered.

CHRA s. 5 It is a discriminatory practice in the provision of goods, services, facilities or accommodation customarily available to the general public (b) to differentiate adversely in relation to any individual, on a prohibited ground of discrimination.

CD 100 s. 58: Steps must be taken to maximize the privacy and confidentiality of any information related to an [incarcerated person's] gender identity or expression. This information will only be shared within CSC with those directly involved with the [incarcerated person's] care and only when relevant, unless otherwise agreed to by the [incarcerated person].

CAEFS' Recommendations: By creating programming specifically for transgender women, this undermines transwomen's access to privacy and confidentiality related to their gender identity. If CSC moves forward with this approach, CAEFS recommends that it should not be included as a requirement in anyone's correctional plan until such time that it is universally and equitably available at all sites; and programming already completed should be credited.

Use of Force and Dry Cell

Description: CAEFS raised an individual case, with that individual's signed consent. This individual is Indigenous. The individual reported to CAEFS that she consumed a letter during the course of a routine frisk search of her living unit. After she put the letter in her mouth, one of the officers performing the search restrained her while the other forcibly opened and searched her mouth by putting her fingers into her mouth. Following this, she was cuffed for over an hour. She reports that the cuffs were too tight and left bruises and scratches on her wrist. She reports that she was transferred to dry cell, where she remained for 3 days. During the course of those days, she acknowledges that she was offered body scans and urinalysis testing but declined. She reported to CAEFS that she felt frustrated, dehumanized, and violated and did not want to submit to further searches at that time. She reported that during her time in the dry cell she was menstruating. She shared that she was only provided pads, despite asking for tampons on multiple occasions. She reported that she had multiple accidents as a result. She reported that she was unable to sleep for most of the time she was in dry-cell as officers required that her hands be visible at all times. In particular, she reports that anytime she fell asleep if her hands were not visible, she would be woken up. The individual reports that her time in dry cell was dehumanizing and degrading. She reported being unaware of what her rights were while she was in the dry cell and that a handbook or access to the CD related to dry celling would have been helpful to her.

Following the 3 days in dry cell she was briefly moved to observation, and then to the maximum-security unit where she is awaiting a new OSL review. Prior to being placed in dry cell and now max, she was in school full time and actively working with an elder to support with cultural teachings.



Discussion:

- The IMT said that they would do a use of force review, as this did not align with what they understood occurred and that they did not believe she reported an excessive use of force at the time.
- The IMT shared that they were concerned that the individual had ingested an illicit drug. They reported that the placement in the dry cell was for her safety. The IMT reported that the individual removed a package from her person after the dry cell.
- The IMT identified her as a “key player of the drug subculture” and reported that what she swallowed was a debt sheet. The search was conducted based on intelligence from people incarcerated in the MSU.
- The IMT agreed to look into why tampons were not provided.
- The IMT agreed to look into why she was required to have her hands visible during sleep.
- CAEFS emphasized that regardless of why she was in dry cell, her experience of being there was dehumanizing.
- CAEFS asked if, given the concerns around illicit drugs, the individual was involved in any programming to address addiction. The IMT shared that she has finished all of her programming.
- The IMT spoke about the individual’s lack of accountability and described her behaviour as self-sabotaging.
- The IMT reported that her rights while in the dry-cell were included in the paperwork provided to her.

Law & Policy:

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, s. 12: Everyone has the right not to be subjected to any cruel and unusual treatment or punishment.

CCRA s. 4(g): correctional policies, programs and practices respect gender, ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic differences, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, and are responsive to the special needs of women, Indigenous persons, visible minorities, persons requiring mental health care and other groups.

National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, Calls for Justice, 5.22: We call upon the federal government to return women’s corrections to the key principles set out in *Creating Choices* (1990).

National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, Calls for Justice, 14.6: We call upon Correctional Service Canada and provincial and territorial services to provide intensive and comprehensive mental health, addictions, and trauma services for incarcerated Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, ensuring that the term of care is needs-based and not tied to the duration of incarceration. These plans and services must follow the individuals as they reintegrate into the community.

CAEFS’ Recommendations: Ending the practice of dry-celling is a necessary step for CSC to uphold its legal and ethical obligations and reduce harm to incarcerated individuals. CAEFS also encourages CSC and the federal government more broadly to align their approach to addiction with evidence-based research that understands addiction to be a healthcare issue, rather than a problematic or criminal behaviour and to meaningfully answer the Calls for Justice set out in the *National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*.

Committee Funds & Signing Authority

Description: Committees reported to CAEFS that their requests to spend their funds are often being denied, or if not denied then management is being prescriptive in when and how they can spend their funds. Committees also reported delays in accessing funds and purchasing. They reported that the acting program manager is not authorized to sign and so all requests are directed to the AWI, causing a delay.



Discussion:

- The IMT shared that the use of funds must correlate back to the purpose of the committee, and that committees are often using funds to try to raise more funds (i.e. fundraisers).
- The IMT reported that a cap on fundraisers was required because of the demand on staff resources.
- The IMT reported that optics and anticipated public perception are also a consideration when approving committee funds.

Law & Policy:

CD 860, s. 32: Disbursements from the Inmate Welfare Fund will be authorized only to:

- a) provide for education, social, cultural and recreational activities for [incarcerated people]
- b) provide amenities for [incarcerated people]
- c) grant loans to meet group needs consistent with this section (individual loans are prohibited)
- d) pay for the cost of [incarcerated people's] publications where such costs exceed the amount received from subscriptions, advertisements and donations
- e) make donations to recognized charitable organizations and causes as approved by the Institutional Head
- f) pay for legal fees on behalf of groups of [incarcerated people.]

CD 860, s. 33: Once a collective need has been identified and the use of the Inmate Welfare Fund approved, the Institutional Head will ensure the funds are committed for use. Any amount in excess of the commitment must be paid from the Inmate Welfare Fund. Should sufficient funds not be available, reimbursement of this amount will be a priority from future deposits.

CAEFS' Recommendations: Peer led committees are an essential element of the Creating Choices model of incarceration, and are legislated through various principles within the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. Functional committees provide individuals with the opportunity to build community, positively contribute to the penitentiary environment, and to develop transferable vocational skills that will aid in community re-entry. Committees promote a culture of democracy and shared responsibility as well as empowerment, which is bolstered when committees are empowered to decide how to use their funds, within the framework set out in CD 860.

