



Carole Chen, Warden  
Fraser Valley Institution for Women  
33344 King Rd, Abbotsford, BC V2S 6J5

**Re: January 2025 Advocacy Visit Follow-Up**

February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Dear Carole,

We want to thank the Institutional Management Team (IMT) at Fraser Valley Institution (FVI) for taking the time to meet with our Pacific Regional Advocacy Team on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2025, via Teams. This letter details the overarching issues at FVI that were reported to The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) during our advocacy visit on January 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025. It also includes our summary of the discussion that took place during the meeting mentioned above, relevant laws and policies, and CAEFS' recommendations.

## 1. Meaningful Employment

**Description:** Individuals of all security classifications shared about challenges to accessing meaningful employment at FVI. People informed advocates that most employment positions available at the penitentiary are part-time cleaning positions, and that there are not enough positions for people who are aging in custody or who have physical or cognitive disabilities. Although the Manager of Programs at FVI has recently been working alongside the Inmate Wellness Committee (IWC) and the FVI population to create new institutionally recognized employment positions, people continue to report that there are not enough employment opportunities to meet the needs of the population, and that accessing employment at FVI that does not involve cleaning and/or sanitation is very competitive.

A suggestion made by several individuals as well as committees was for one person from each shared living unit to be hired by the penitentiary to represent the needs of that unit to FVI institutional management. Advocates were told that this "House Rep" position could be a good opportunity for people to feel they are meaningfully contributing to their living spaces, and more broadly to the conditions of confinement at FVI.

**Discussion:** Institutional Management agreed that many employment opportunities currently available at FVI are cleaning positions, but new positions were recently developed and include the paid position of resident artist and editor of a newly established FVI newsletter. IMT stated that most individuals who want employment are employed, but that some people do not want to work. IMT said they would consult with the IWC on the creation of additional employment positions at FVI.

### **Law/Policy:**

Corrections and Conditional Release Act (CCRA), section 3(b): The purpose of the federal correctional system is to contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by assisting the rehabilitation of [people who are incarcerated] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community.

CCRA, section 4(c.2): The Service ensures the effective delivery of programs to [incarcerated persons], including correctional, educational, vocational training and volunteer programs, with a view to improving access to alternatives to custody in a penitentiary and to promoting rehabilitation.

CCRA, section 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, section 76: The Service shall provide a range of programs designed to address the needs of [incarcerated persons] and contribute to their successful reintegration into the community.

Commissioner's Directive (CD) 083 (Inmate Committees), section 42: The range/living unit/house representatives on the Inmate Committee may be paid at the discretion of the Institutional Head.

CD 700 (Correctional Interventions), section 4(3): The Institutional Head will ensure correctional policies, assessments, programs and practices respect and are responsive to:

1. gender, including the special needs of women [who are incarcerated]
2. ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences, including Indigenous [incarcerated persons]
3. [incarcerated persons] requiring mental health care and those with physical disabilities

**CAEFS Recommendations:** CAEFS recommends for the CSC to extend the rights and protections guaranteed to Canadian workers in the Canadian Labour Code to incarcerated people employed by the CSC. CAEFS is encouraged to learn of new employment positions created at FVI and that institutional management is aware of the need for more employment options at the penitentiary. We are looking forward to hearing more about expanded meaningful employment options for the people incarcerated at FVI.

## 2. Consultation with Population at FVI

**Description:** Advocates were made aware that the population is seeking additional opportunities to have their voices heard and ideas considered by FVI's institutional management team. Individuals expressed interest in reinstating bi-monthly or quarterly town halls with FVI's institutional management team to increase direct communication and consultation with the population.

People who incarcerated at FVI reported wanting to contribute to their living environment and build community with their peers. The CAEFS Lead Advocate and Peer Advocates offered to host a committee workshop at FVI to increase the population's knowledge and understanding of committees as legislated mechanisms to represent the various needs of the population to institutional management. The CAEFS team could collaborate with existing committees, such as the IWC, to strengthen committee participation through knowledge mobilization and community building. The goal of this workshop is to address the existing knowledge gap regarding committees at FVI, while also supporting people to be active members both in their communities and in institutional decision-making.



**Discussion:** IMT encouraged CAEFS advocates to submit a structured program proposal for the proposed committee workshop. IMT said that getting people to participate in committee work has been challenging at FVI, and they welcome the idea of augmenting established processes for population consultation, such as committee consultation. Once the aforementioned proposal is approved, IMT suggested providing people at FVI with a one-page description of the workshop and its desired learning outcomes. IMT informed advocates that by providing people with notice of the workshop, they will have the opportunity to bring questions and arrive to the workshop prepared.

#### **Law/Policy:**

CCRA, section 74: The Service shall provide [people in prison] with the opportunity to contribute to decisions of the Service affecting the population [of incarcerated people] as a whole, or affecting a group within the [incarcerated] population, except decisions relating to security matters.

CD 767 (Ethnocultural [People in Prison]), section 9: The Institutional Head will: (b) foster an environment where ethnocultural activities, services and interventions can take place; (c) allow [incarcerated persons] to form ethnocultural associations or committees that will meet their cultural needs and interests.

CD 083 (Inmate Committees), Purpose: To establish a forum for inmate engagement and input regarding institutional operations and policies.

**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. CAEFS was encouraged to hear that the IMT at FVI sees the value of these committees. CAEFS offers our support and resources to assist in strengthening committees and supporting effective communication between committees and institutional management toward the resolution of systemic issues.

### **3. Core Programming**

**Description:** People reported feeling uncomfortable when asked to complete specific tasks in core programming delivered the penitentiary. It was anonymously reported to CAEFS advocates that core program facilitators are encouraging people who are wrongfully convicted and/or people awaiting appeal to complete assignments and engage in programming “as if they were guilty”. Advocates were informed that facilitators are reportedly asking people to do this to “get the most out of programming”.

Advocates received consent to discuss this topic at our January institutional management team meeting, while ensuring the anonymity of those experiencing this reported issue.

The creation of false documentation in programming that relates to a person’s conviction could negatively and profoundly impact the liberty of people who are wrongfully convicted and/or in or awaiting appeal in federal prisons designated for women.

**Discussion:** IMT confirmed that they would discuss this reported issue with the Manager of Programs. IMT stated that they will review the protocol for program facilitators who are working with people who are wrongfully convicted or appealing their conviction in programming.



**Law/Policy:**

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, section 7: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, section 11(d): Any person charged with an offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law in a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal.

The Canadian Bill of Rights, section 2(e): Every law of Canada shall, unless it is expressly declared by an Act of the Parliament of Canada that it shall operate notwithstanding the Canadian Bill of Rights, be so construed and applied as not to abrogate, abridge or infringe or to authorize the abrogation, abridgment or infringement of any of the rights of freedoms herein recognized and declared, and in particular, no law of Canada shall be construed or applied so as to: deprive a person of the right to a fair hearing in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice for the determination of his rights and obligations.

**CAEFS Recommendations:** Women and gender-diverse people who are federally incarcerated in Canada face unique barriers to overturning wrongful convictions such as the hyper-responsibilization that occurs through prison processes, which directly and coercively pressure people in Canadian federal prisons designated for women take ownership of situations that they are not responsible for. CAEFS encourages the CSC to prepare for the enactment of Bill C-40 and its corresponding impact on the people who are wrongfully convicted in their care and custody.

**4. Access to Conditional Release**

**Description:** People reported on the challenges to accessing conditional release at the earliest possible dates. The reported causes for delays to conditional release at FVI are institutional parole officers (IPO) not translating documentation in time for a Parole Board of Canada (PBC) hearing, the IPO not recommending release to the PBC and therefore not providing release planning support, and IPOs telling people that release planning is outside of their jurisdiction and is instead the responsibility of the community parole officer.

Individuals at FVI also informed advocates that they do not want to use the legislated CSC grievance procedure to file a complaint or grievance against their IPO due to the power imbalance and the perceived potential impacts on their conditional release being supported.

**Discussion:** IMT said they are aware of the translation issue and working to complete the PBC's translation request as quickly as possible. IMT said they will follow up with IPOs regarding the scope of their position and its requirement to support people with community reintegration at their earliest possible dates.

**Law/Policy:**

CCRA, section 3(a): The purpose of the correctional system is to contribute to a just, peaceful, and safe society by carrying out sentences imposed by courts through the safe and human custody and supervision of [incarcerated people] and by assisting the rehabilitation of incarcerated people and their reintegration into community as law-abiding citizens.

CCRA, section 5(b)(c): There shall continue to be a correctional service in and for Canada, to be known as the Correctional Service of Canada, which shall be responsible for: (b) the provision of programs that contribute to



the rehabilitation of [incarcerated people] and to their successful reintegration into the community; (c) the preparation of [people who are incarcerated] for release.

CD 700 (Correctional Interventions), section 10(e): parole officers will facilitate the reintegration of [people who are incarcerated] into community at the earliest possible date while ensuring public and staff safety in all case management decisions.

**CAEFS Recommendations:** Conditional release provides individuals with the strongest opportunities to be successful in their reintegration. According to the Parole Board of Canada, the gradual release of individuals from incarceration, also known as the continuum of release, is the best way to reintegrate people who are incarcerated into community. CAEFS appreciates IMT's willingness to follow up with institutional parole officers at FVI to ensure they are providing the individuals they work alongside with adequate reintegration information, resources, and supports to facilitate their reintegration to community at the earliest possible date.

## 5. Library

**Description:** Individuals in the maximum-security unit reported on the barriers to accessing the library and library services. Advocates were informed that people in the maximum-security unit do not have access to the library, and were told that they cannot access the library for approximately 1.5 months. Individuals reported that there is one trolley of books available to people in maximum security, and this one trolley is reportedly not enough to accommodate the month and a half of reduced library access.

Individuals in the maximum-security unit said that if they had been notified of this change prior to the interruption of library services and given the opportunity to take out more books than typically allotted from the library, this change in access would have felt more manageable.

**Discussion:** IMT said that the CSC librarian is away, but the library is still staffed with two library clerks. The book cart is still going to the maximum-security unit on Thursdays, but this could be increased if requests are made to the Correctional Manager of the maximum-security unit. IMT informed advocates that individuals can also request specific books from the library and request to extend the borrowing time of their books.

### **Law/Policy:**

CCRA, section 4(g): All 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.

CCRR, section 97(3): The CSC shall that all people who are incarcerated have reasonable access to legal counsel and legal reading materials, and non-legal reading materials.

CD 720 (Education Programs and Services for [People who are Incarcerated]), section 6 (g): The Institutional Head will: ensure that library services support all institutional programs and address the [incarcerated people's] needs for computer literacy and recreational, cultural, religious, spiritual, educational, legal and informative materials, while taking into consideration the requirements of the correctional environment; (i) ensure that all



incarcerated people, including those who do not have access to a library, have reasonable access to legal and non-legal reading materials, pursuant to section 97(3) of the CCRR.

**CAEFS Recommendations:** Broad access to programs and services can be enhanced by increasing community engagement with people in the maximum-security unit. Even with programs and services available, CAEFS notes that the architecture of the unit will lead individuals to feeling isolated, given the stark contrast of the unit's conditions with those in the general population. CAEFS encourages FVI to increase access to programming and supports external to maximum-security unit, such as the penitentiary's library, for individuals classified as maximum security.

## 6. Vocational Training

**Description:** Individuals at FVI reported on the limited access to vocational training for individuals aging in custody, particularly for people with life sentences who are nearing their day parole eligibility date.

Individuals with life sentences in the minimum-security unit at FVI identified the need for vocational technology and business training with transferable skills to support with community reintegration and employment post long-term incarceration. Advocates also received requests for work training opportunities that are not physically demanding and can be completed by people with varying cognitive and physical abilities.

**Discussion:** IMT told advocates that vocational training at FVI takes place in waves, with painting and forklift training recently ending. IMT said that an individual's correctional plan considers their age at release, and access to training is dependent on their conditional release timeline. The lack of access to technology within the penitentiary was identified by IMT as a barrier to offering technology-specific vocational training. IMT also shared with advocates that CORCAN will be announcing its new partnerships with Indigenous businesses in the near future.

### **Law/Policy:**

Canadian Human Rights Act, section 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.

CCRA, section 3(b): The purpose of the federal correctional system is to contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by assisting the rehabilitation of people who are incarcerated and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community.

CCRA, section 76: The Service shall provide a range of programs designed to address the needs of [incarcerated persons] and contribute to their successful reintegration into the community.

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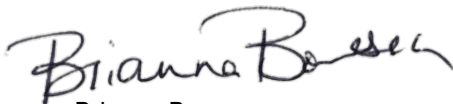


**CAEFS Recommendations:** Meaningful access to diverse and modernized vocational training is necessary for people incarcerated in Canadian federal penitentiaries to successfully reintegrate into community post-incarceration. The CSC is negatively impacting the employment potential of people in their custody and care by restricting access to technology over the course of incarceration.

CAEFS encourages the CSC to increase access to technology within Canadian federal penitentiaries by providing incarcerated populations with access to the technological devices that are standard in most communities and workplaces, such as iPhones, laptops, and tablets.

Thank you for taking the time to review this letter and for your continued efforts to improve the outcomes for individuals in your custody and care. CAEFS appreciates IMT's willingness to engage in dialogue with the people incarcerated at FVI to ensure the voices of those impacted are included in institutional decisions. CAEFS encourages FVI to continue collaborating with the committees at FVI to improve the conditions of confinement and create a penitentiary environment that is aligned with law and policy, and the Principles of Creating Choices.

Respectfully,



Brianna Bourassa  
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