



Lilian Kordic
Edmonton Institution for Women
11151 178 St NW Unit 1, Edmonton, AB T5S 2H9
Sent via email.

April 7th, 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 me and a member of our Regional Advocacy team on March 13th, 2025, in person at EIFW.

This letter summarizes reports received and conditions observed during our visit to the Edmonton Institution for Women from March 11th March 13th 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, reading 'J. Omstead', is positioned below the text 'Respectfully,'.

Jacqueline Omstead
Senior Advocate

Finance

Description: CAEFS received reports that people are only receiving “basic allowance” pay instead of school or program pay. CAEFS also received reports that many people do not understand the pay sheets and that there is limited information is provided by EIFW to support people’s understanding. As a result, people suspected that many people were not aware or unable to determine if they were being paid correctly.

People shared that having these errors corrected was complicated and time-consuming, reporting that they had submitted requests to their program facilitators, but were redirected to finance, and that finance often did not respond. One person shared that they had filed a complaint and that it was upheld, but that no timeline was provided for when they could expect the missing funds to be deposited into their account. CAEFS received reports that missing pay has impacts people’s ability to phone their family and purchase needed canteen items.

It was shared with CAEFS that having a breakdown of the pay sheet added to the handbook and included as part of orientation would be helpful in resolving some of these concerns.

Discussion: The IMT recently completed a pay audit and identified administrative errors, primarily overpayments. They informed the House Representatives and the Inmate Committee of these findings before implementing pay adjustments. CAEFS and the IMT also discussed other audit findings. For those who continue to notice pay discrepancies, the IMT recommended addressing concerns with supervisors, as finance does not determine days worked. Additionally, the IMT noted that a staff member is available weekly to assist with pay sheet clarification but noted that this resource is not being utilized. To increase awareness, the IMT offered to send a reminder memo. Both CAEFS and the IMT agreed that the current pay sheet is not easily understandable and could be improved.

Law & Policy:

CCRA, s.78 (1) For the purpose of (a) encouraging [incarcerated people] to participate in programs provided by the Service, or (b) providing financial assistance to [incarcerated people] to facilitate their reintegration into the community, the Commissioner may authorize payments to [incarcerated people] at rates approved by the Treasury Board.

CAEFS’ Recommendations: CAEFS appreciated EIFW’s offer to share a memo reminding people of the resources available to them to support their understanding of their pay sheets. Further, CAEFS supports the recommendation from the population to simplify the paysheet and include information about paysheets and processes in the institutional handbook and as part of orientation. More broadly, CAEFS continues to recommend that CSC adjust compensation to the rate of inflation in order to meaningfully support in reintegrating people back into community as law-abiding citizens as the amount that incarcerated people are compensated for their labour within penitentiaries has not been updated since the 1980s and no longer reflects current cost of living.

Committees

Description: Executive members of “Little Sisters” reported that they are not being paid for their work on the committee.

People in the maximum-security unit shared with CAEFS that they would like to have an Inmate Committee representative specific to max, in addition to pod representatives.

Discussion: The IMT clarified that only the Ethnocultural Chair and Inmate Committee Chair hold paid positions, and that the workload does not justify compensation for Little Sisters’ executive members. However, they advised that the executive may submit a proposal for consideration. Additionally, the IMT does not support appointing an Inmate Committee representative for the maximum-security unit due to incompatibilities and other limiting dynamics (such as gang affiliations and the suspected passing of contraband). Instead, the Inmate Committee Chair conducts regular visits, and house representatives attend



meetings to voice concerns on behalf of the unit. Individuals may also request to meet with the Chair outside scheduled meetings.

Law & Policy:

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

CCRA s.3: 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.

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. Committees also promote a culture of democracy and shared responsibility as well as empowerment. 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. Compensating executive members for their work on committees recognizes the significance of committees within penitentiaries designated for women, increases committee capacity, and is aligned with the broader purpose of CSC to assist in reintegration into community

Peer Support

Description: People in the maximum-security unit reported experiencing barriers to timely access to peer support. They shared that it can often take hours to coordinate having a peer support worker come back to the maximum-security unit, but that people often need more immediate support. People shared that a lack of timely access has resulted in people continuing to become escalated, to the point where there is staff intervention. People shared that how frustrating it can be to be told that they should have asked for help, when they have. A possible solution that was shared with CAEFS was hiring peer support workers who are classified as maximum-security.

Discussion: The IMT does not support hiring a peer support worker classified as maximum-security, citing difficulties in finding suitable candidates. When candidates have been identified, they often transfer to medium security. The IMT also noted that some peer support requests may be linked to drug subculture involvement. They emphasized that individuals in need have alternative staff resources.

Law & Policy:

CCRA s. 73 [Incarcerated people] are entitled to reasonable opportunities to assemble peacefully and associate with other [incarcerated people] within the penitentiary, subject to such reasonable limits as are prescribed for protecting the security of the penitentiary or the safety of persons.

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, ensuring incarcerated individuals in maximum-security units with ready access to peer support is essential. Peer support offers incarcerated people structured emotional, social, and practical support from others who have shared similar experiences, fostering a sense of community and contributing to safer and more humane conditions of confinement.

Access to Family and Community: Telephone Systems

Description: CAEFS received reports that it is not uncommon for it to take months to have phone numbers approved and added to one's PIN. When asked, people shared that they believe this delay is related to the process for approving numbers. They shared that someone from the institution will call the people who they have requested to have added in order to approve them, but that this presents a number of barriers, including: that many people no longer answer the phone when they do not recognize the number, that they are receiving calls during business hours when they are unable to answer, or that they feel uncomfortable answering identifying questions without more information about who is calling.

People also shared with CAEFS that they would like more resources available on the Common Access list, and questioned why it was only permitted to have 35 phone numbers on the list.

Discussion: The IMT and CAEFS reviewed the current call approval process. The IMT stated that staff should document call attempts and approvals should be completed within 15 days. Acknowledging that calls are a primary form of communication, they committed to reminding staff of the importance of timely approvals. They also recommended that individuals note their preferred call times on their PIN list submissions to improve efficiency. Regarding the Common Access List, the IMT recently became aware of a national approved list that could free up some of the 35 available phone numbers. The number of permitted contacts is outlined in the Commissioner's Directives.

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 085 s.2: Institutional Standing Orders shall set out the following: (b) procedures for establishing or amending an [an incarcerated person's] authorized call list (Call Allow List) - normally this should be processed within 15 working days of the [incarcerated person's] written request

CAEFS' Recommendations: A primary reason that Canadian penitentiaries designated from women were built in each region was to promote close community and familial contact for federally sentenced women and gender-diverse people. All CSC decisions should be made in the spirit of facilitating the most broad and accessible access to community and family as possible. As such, CAEFS recommends augmenting the process for confirming numbers on people's PIN lists to ensure timely access to family. This could include directing staff to leave voicemails and providing the option for people to call back to confirm.

Grievances Process

Description: Two people shared with CAEFS that their grievances were not accepted because they were longer than 4 pages. In one case, the grievance filed was related to the individual's placement in, and treatment during, dry cell. The bulletin limiting the number of pages allows for grievances longer than 4 pages to be accepted based on seriousness or complexity. The refusal of this grievance raised concerns regarding how seriousness / complexity is being assessed.

Discussion: Most members of the IMT stated they were unaware of the memo limiting the number of pages for grievance submissions. They expressed being overwhelmed by grievances that they believe would be better addressed through conversation, noting that when they do meet with individuals to discuss their grievances, people often opt to withdraw. While acknowledging that some issues warrant formal grievances, the IMT shared that they preferred resolving matters through



dialogue, seeing it as a faster and more effective approach, noting that many grievances are unclear, particularly people's attempts at applying law and policy. Additionally, the IMT shared that they have observed a cultural shift in grievance usage in recent months, citing a significant increase in the number of grievances being filed. They expressed frustration that many grievances come from "chronic grievors" rather than individuals who they see as genuinely in need advocacy support.

Law & Policy:

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

CCRR, s. 74 (1) If an [incarcerated person] is dissatisfied with an action or a decision by a staff member, [they] may submit a written complaint to the supervisor of that staff member. (2) **Where a complaint is submitted** pursuant to subsection (1), every effort shall be made by staff members and the [incarcerated person] to resolve the matter informally through discussion. [emphasis added]

CAEFS' Recommendation: The grievance system is the legislated tool through which individuals can resolve the issues they face. When incarcerated people utilize the complaint and grievance process, they are resolving conflict in ways that align with law, policy, and the principles of Creating Choices. CAEFS is committed to fostering a climate of legal literacy within penitentiaries and hope that GVI will actively work alongside us to ensure that access to the system is supported, accessible, and free from barriers.

Referrals for Detention

Description: CAEFS received reports from people with outstanding charges that they were concerned about being referred to detention, rather than being remanded. People shared that remaining at EIFW would make attending court and communicating with their lawyers challenging, as their outstanding charges are not in the Edmonton area. People also are reported that staff were asking them about their outstanding charges, which they felt was inappropriate and had been advised by their lawyers not to discuss their charges.

Discussion: The IMT stated that all individuals are assessed against the CCRA's detention criteria. Those who meet the criteria are referred to the Parole Board. Until their warrant expiry date, they remain under federal custody, and any outstanding charges must be reviewed before granting conditional release.

Law & Policy:

CCRA, s. 129-132 sets out the criteria and review process for detention during Statutory Release.

CCRA s. 16 (1) The Minister may, with the approval of the Governor in Council, enter into an agreement with the government of a province for (a) the confinement in provincial correctional facilities or hospitals in that province of persons sentenced, committed or transferred to penitentiary

CAEFS' Recommendations: Where criteria for detention during statutory release is met, and the individual has outstanding charges in another jurisdiction, CAEFS recommends the transfer of individuals to a provincial prison to facilitate access to legal counsel and court appearances.

