



Shannon MacDonald – Acting Warden
Nova Institution for Women
180 James Street
Truro, Nova Scotia B2N 6R8

May 5, 2025

Re: CAEFS Regional Advocacy Visit, March and April 2025

This letter details the issues at NIFW that were reported to the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) Atlantic Regional Advocacy Team during our visits to NIFW in March and April 2025.

Thank you, and we look forward to your response.

Food Insecurity Reported in the Maximum-Security Unit

Description: Individuals in the maximum-security unit reported limited access to sufficient food and one individual stated that “We are always hungry up here”. People reported that they were not receiving enough food and stated that each meal consists primarily of starchy fist-sized portions of plain oatmeal, processed breakfast cereals, pasta and/or white rice. Individuals reported being hungry as a result of the lack of food and also that there are very limited food options. Individuals also reported that access to protein sources (meat and/or alternatives) is limited and importantly that portion sizes (for all food options) are dependent on the individual cooks who are on duty.

Discussion: Management stated that there is a standard national menu that is followed in the maximum-security unit, which is based on calorie counts and is very strictly monitored. Management stated that they have not recently received any complaints about portions or food options, but did admit the food options allowed under the standard national menu are very limited. As to the issue of discrepancies in portion sizes, management confirmed that the same person cooks Monday to Friday, with a different person cooking on the weekends. Management stated that people are encouraged to follow the grievance process to address these issues and investigations will ensue.

Law & Policy:

CD 880-1: Food services (Central Feeding)

Purpose: To ensure meals provided to the *[incarcerated person] sic* population meet the appropriate nutritional and food safety standards for Canadians such as Canada’s Food Guides and the Food Safety Code of Practice for Canada’s Foodservice Industry.



Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of [incarcerated persons] (Nelson Mandela Rules)

Food 20(1): Every [incarcerated person] shall be provided by the administration at the usual hours with food of nutritional value adequate for health and strength, of wholesome quality and well prepared and served.

CAEFS' Recommendations: CAEFS has previously raised issues of food security in the maximum-security unit to NIFW management (see CAEFS advocacy letter dated August 16, 2024). Further, a 2019 audit of CSC food services found that there is “confusion amongst staff in the day-to-day production of food” and “the lack of consistent oversight surrounding key areas of food services has led to an increased risk of not complying with legislative requirements a responsibility to provide adequate amounts of nutritious food that are in line with Canada’s Food Guide.”¹ There is ample research speaking to the necessity of adequate diet and nutrition.² CAEFS recommends that NIFW focuses attention to improve food standards to support the health of incarcerated people with the goal of maintaining and improving people’s health.

Food Safety Reports

Description: CAEFS received several reports from individuals that the NIFW Canteen Officer is instructing people to repackage food items stored in glass jars/bottles, which are purchased through the canteen. People who have purchased items such as, but not limited to, coffee and peanut butter, are instructed to open these products at the canteen and put them into plastic baggies. People are concerned about the safety and hygiene of repackaging of food items in the canteen area. People expressed concern about the potential cross-contamination of food items under these conditions, and also about the shortened shelf-life of food being repackaged into plastic baggies. People reported being concerned about having these unlabeled items in their living units and the possibility of misidentification during staff searches.

Discussion: NMT stated that there is ongoing process at the institution to replace canteen products that are packaged in glass containers, with alternatives in plastic jars/bottles. It was further stated that there has been no direction from management to move food items into baggies. Management stated that they will investigate this activity.

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 persons] and the working conditions of staff members are safe, healthful and free of practices that undermine a person’s sense of personal dignity.

CD 880-1: Food services (Central Feeding)

Food Safety

33. The Food Safety Code of Practice for Canada’s Foodservice Industry is the cornerstone for all aspects of food safety in CSC.

CAEFS' Recommendations: Access to healthy and safe food supports overall health, wellbeing, and dignity of incarcerated people. CAEFS urges CSC to follow the guidelines in the Food Safety Code of Practice for Canada’s

¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/correctional-service/corporate/transparency/audits-evaluations/food-services.html#4.0>

² <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/guidelines/section-1-foundation-healthy-eating/>



Foodservice Industry³ (as referenced in CD 880-1, S.33 above) which provide clear parameters on standards of safety, storage and labeling of food items.

Changes to Institutional Items – Outerwear/Jackets and Removal of Lamps

Description: Many people at NIFW reported dissatisfaction with the replacement of winter parkas with newly issued spring jackets. It was reported that the jackets appear to be made for male incarcerated people and as a result are often ill-fitting. It was also reported that individual lamps are being removed from people's rooms with no option of replacements.

Discussion: Management stated that a decision was made at NHQ last Fall to switch to the green summer jackets currently provided by CSC, and that this decision is alignment with other institutions designated for women. Management admitted that the jackets are not offered in a woman's cut and that this issue was raised with NHQ and is currently being investigated to discern if alternatives will be made available.

Management stated that lamps (which were originally issued through Institutional Services) are not being removed but are being weaned out of use through attrition – as in when the lamps are broken and/or not working – they are removed from individual's room. Management explained that a safety concern occurred in another women's institution that has prompted this action. Currently, management is resourcing other lamps, deemed to be a safer option, that will be available for purchase through incarcerated person's catalogue.

Law & Policy:

CCRA S.70

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

CD 352 S.6(a)

The Institutional Heads shall specify requirements for female [incarcerated person's] clothing, including the item and type, and the frequency and quantity of issue female clothing is usually purchased locally.

Creating Choices: The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women (1990)

Federally sentenced women experience feelings of disempowerment and low self-esteem due to social inequities and reduced life choices in prison. The Creating Choices principles of empowerment and meaningful and responsible choices highlight the importance of increasing choices for people incarcerated in prisons designated for women to promote strength, good self-esteem, and to create a constructive cycle of empowerment.⁴

CAEFS' Recommendations: CAEFS encourages NIFW to broaden its application of Creating Choices philosophies of empowerment, support, and person-centered care in its administration of the material conditions of incarceration,

³ <https://inspection.canada.ca/en/food-safety-industry/toolkit-food-businesses/glossary-key-terms#a19>

⁴ <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/csc-scc/migration/002/002/092/002002-0001-en.pdf>



including the provision of clothing that aligns with their gender to people who identify as women. We look forward to learning about alternatives that will be made available to individuals at NIFW in the future.

Staff Communications with Incarcerated Persons

Description: Several people reported to CAEFS regional advocates that one staff member, the NIFW Canteen Officer, has made several inappropriate and unprofessional comments to them. Comments focussed on the recently issued institutional jackets, and direction that some canteen items must be repackaged in plastic baggies. It was reported that when individuals questioned food safety related to the repackaging, and the lack of female jackets, the Canteen Officer stated that there were going to be a lot of changes at NIFW and that because he has worked at several men's institutions, NIFW is going to follow processes at those institutions. People reported that these unprofessional and insensitive comments are inappropriate in a penitentiary designated for women.

Discussion: CAEFS regional advocates brought up this issue with NMT because it stood out to them that several people identified this specific staff member as making unprofessional comments. CAEFS questioned whether it is appropriate for a male staff member to talk to incarcerated people at NIFW in this manner, and whether or not this staff member has the authority to make these kinds of changes to processes. NMT confirmed that there is process in place to make changes to processes and that they will follow up to have a conversation to get more information regarding these alleged comments.

Law & Policy:

CCRA S.4

(d) [incarcerated persons] retain the rights of all members of society except those that are, as a consequence of the sentence, lawfully and necessarily removed or restricted;

(f) correctional decisions are made in a forthright and fair manner, with access by the [incarcerated person] to an effective grievance procedure;

(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;

Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of [incarcerated persons] (Nelson Mandela Rules)

Rule 1: All [incarcerated persons] shall be treated with the respect due to their inherent dignity and value as human beings. No [incarcerated person] shall be subjected to, and all [incarcerated persons] shall be protected from, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, for which no circumstances whatsoever may be invoked as a justification. The safety and security of [incarcerated persons], staff, service providers and visitors shall be ensured at all times.

CAEFS' Recommendations: Creating Choices was unequivocal in pointing out that that correctional management strategies were developed within a White male context, and through the application of gender-based analysis CSC policy on federally sentenced women continues to develop to meet the unique needs of women and gender-diverse people. 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. A meaningful



application of Creating Choices necessitates that all staff members are trained to engage with incarcerated people in ways that foster humane and respectful interactions and communications.

Gender-Affirming Clothing

Description: An individual reported that A&D denied their request to have gender-affirming garments brought into the institution by a family member. The individual showed the CAEFS' regional advocate the Request Response from A&D which included a copy of CD 566-1 S.17:

Following a first transfer to an institution that better aligns with an [incarcerated person's] gender identity or expression, the gender diverse [incarcerated person] will be entitled to replace personal property items with items that support their gender identity or expression needs and are sent from outside sources, only once within 30 calendar days of the transfer.

The individual reported feeling dismissed by the staff member response and wondered if it is allowed for a CSC employee to deny their human rights protected

Discussion: Management stated that in these circumstances the warden can make an exception to the 30-day policy set out in CD 566-12 and stressed that they ensure that gender-diverse people have items and support that they need from community agencies and/or family members. Management also confirmed that they will follow up on this request and look into why this negative response was given by the staff in the A&D department.

Law & Policy:

CD 100

Purpose

To provide direction on procedural changes that reflect the Correctional Service of Canada's (CSC's) commitment to meeting the needs of its gender diverse [incarcerated persons] population in ways that respect their human rights and ensure their safety and dignity as well as the safety of others in the institutions and community

25. At any time during an [incarcerated person's] sentence, if the [incarcerated person] requests one or more gender related accommodations, the Correctional Manager or the community Parole Officer (when the [incarcerated person] is on conditional release) will complete the individualized protocol in the Immediate Needs – Gender Considerations screen in OMS. The individualized protocol will be updated throughout the [incarcerated person's] sentence, as needed...
27. In cases where the Correctional Manager or the community Parole Officer does not approve a requested accommodation in the individualized protocol, the Assistant Warden, Operations, or the Parole Officer Supervisor will make the final decision and finalize the individualized protocol within three business days, following a discussion with the [incarcerated person]. The Assistant Warden, Operations, or the Parole Officer Supervisor will also ensure that the rationale to approve or deny the accommodation is documented under the applicable section of the individualized protocol.

CAEFS' Recommendations: CAEFS is encouraged that NIFW has responded in a positive way to the individual's needs as directed under the Canadian Human Rights Act, the CCRA and CD100. CAEFS encourages NIFW and the



CSC broadly, to continue to proactively enhance systemic approaches to resolving the reports of barriers created to the safe and inclusive support of transgender individuals within federal penitentiaries.

Mail Delivery - Inconsistencies

Description: CAEFS received a report in general population that mail with sensitive health information that did not belong to them was mistakenly placed in their mailbox. The individual who received the incorrect mail proactively submitted a request to the health care department to alert them of this oversight and the confirm that they returned the personal documents to health care. The request response showed that the health care department thanked the individual for letting them know and offered to meet with the individual if further discussion about this incident was required.

Discussion: Management acknowledged receiving a request and replied to an individual about this matter and confirmed that healthcare documents would generally be hand-delivered to the appropriate individual and suggested that the document received could have been an appointment slip. Management reiterated that they have not received any complaints about mail being delivered to the incorrect individual in a long time and suggested that details of these types of issues should be directed to the correctional manager of mental health services.

Law & Policy:

Privacy Act 7

Use of personal information: Personal information under the control of a government institution shall not, without the consent of the individual to whom it relates, be used by the institution except

- (a) for the purpose for which the information was obtained or compiled by the institution or for a use consistent with that purpose; or
- (b) for a purpose for which the information may be disclosed to the institution under subsection 8(2).

Disclosure of personal information

8 (1) Personal information under the control of a government institution shall not, without the consent of the individual to whom it relates, be disclosed by the institution except in accordance with this section.

CAEFS' Recommendations: CAEFS has received numerous reports of inconsistencies in mail delivery since early 2024 and acknowledges the changes the NIFW made on or around August 2024 that have led to a decrease in the number of reports of personal mail delivered to the wrong individual. However, considering the sensitive nature of health-related documents, CAEFS encourages NIFW to continue the oversight of the delivery of privileged correspondence, and all correspondence, to ensure that all individuals at NIFW are protected from breaches of privacy.

Peer Advocacy – Removal of Access to Locked Storage Drawer and CAEFS' Resources

Description: NIFW Peer Advocates (under the direction of NIFW management, Peer Advocates are titled CAEFS Advocacy Workers {CAWs} at NIFW) reported that their access was removed to the only locked storage drawer available to them in which to keep their binders (which contain personal information related to requests, complaints and grievances) and CAEF's resources such as copies of the Human Rights in Action books were also removed. The drawer, located in the IC's office and within the IC's large filing cabinet, was clearly labelled to show that this was the



CAWs' storage drawer. The label was removed, as was all the contents in the drawer. The CAWs reported being highly concerned about the emptying out of the drawer and removal of the identifying label. Further, they explained that no one from staff met with them to discuss the necessity of these changes, told them where the CAEFS's resources were currently stored, or offered them another secure location to store their work-related information and items. Important to note also, that NIFW staff did not liaise with the CAEFS' regional advocate to discuss any of these changes.

Discussion: Management stated that they had not heard or been notified about these changes from either the IC or Social Programs Officers and suggested that probably someone from the IC removed the label and the resources. CAEFS reiterated that it was vitally important that the CAWs have at least a secure drawer to store work-related information and CAEF's published resources and expressed concern that this action was taken without consulting either the CAWs or the regional advocate. Management stated that it is an expectation that the CAWs and the IC share a space, and that they will address what happened and investigate the whereabouts of the CAEFS' resources.

Law & Policy:

CCRA S.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;

CSC Job Description: Employment/Training Assignment – Advocacy Worker for Female [Incarcerated Persons]
Promote the “rule of law” within the prison, amongst the women and the staff, by developing community support, increase socially acceptable behaviours in regards to conflict resolution, and increase prospects of institutional and reintegration stability in living both within the institution and in the community.

CAEFS' Recommendations: One of the primary purposes of the CSC is to ensure the effective delivery of programs including educational and vocational training programs to individual who are incarcerated. An important program with that ambit is the Peer Advocacy Program which is the result of collaboration between CAEFS and the CSC that has been operational since 2015. CAEFS provides training and ongoing support and professional development to CAWs, while the CSC provides material support and pay, as per CD 730 (Program Assignments and Pay). The Peer Advocacy Program is unique and critical to creating a safer environment for people who are incarcerated and for CSC staff by contributing to legal literacy and pro-social conflict resolution. The promotion of legal literacy and a strong understanding of the rule of law among incarcerated populations supports the goal of the correctional system to support the successful reintegration of individuals as law abiding citizens.

CAEFS looks forward to management's ongoing support for this program and anticipates that a satisfactory resolution to reestablishing a space for the CAWs to securely store their work-related items and resources will be found.

In closing and on behalf of CAEFS Atlantic Regional Advocacy team, I would like to thank the management team at NIFW for continuing to have open dialogue, investigating the reports we raise, and engaging in solutions orientated discussion wherever possible.

Respectfully,
Fiona Traynor
Lead Advocate, Atlantic Regional Advocacy Team, CAEFS

