



To: Angela Beecher, Institutional Head

Grand Valley Institution for Women

1575 Homer Watson Blvd, Kitchener, ON, N2P 2C5

July 14th, 2025

CAEFS' June 2025 Advocacy Letter

Dear Angela,

We want to thank members of the institutional management team (IMT) at GVI for taking the time to meet with our advocacy team on June 27th via Teams.

This letter summarizes reports we received and conditions we observed during our visit to the Grand Valley Institution on June 24th to 26th as well as summaries of the discussion between the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) and members of the institutional management team following the visit, the relevant laws and policies, and CAEFS' recommendations.

We look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

Jacqueline Omstead

Senior Advocate



Physical Conditions of Confinement: Extreme Heat

Description: CAEFS received multiple reports describing serious concerns related to extreme temperatures in living units during the recent heat wave and the limited measures taken to mitigate these conditions. This issue was the primary topic of reporting during our visit this month.

Individuals reported symptoms consistent with heat stroke, including vomiting, severe headaches, and difficulty regulating body temperature. Many reported being unable to sleep due to the heat, and those using CPAP machines noted issues with proper sealing. Freezers in living units reportedly malfunctioned due to the high temperatures, leading to food spoilage.

People also reported that increased irritability due to the heat has contributed to interpersonal conflict. Key cultural events that are tremendously important to incarcerated people (Pride and Indigenous Peoples Day) were postponed due to the heat. The gym—where most events are typically held—lacks air conditioning and adequate fans.

Individuals report having to purchase their own fans through the institutional catalogue or through the Inmate Committee. People shared that fan orders from the catalogue which were submitted months ago remain unfulfilled, with no funds placed on hold. The Inmate Committee has used its own budget to purchase fans for common areas in the living units and has proposed acquiring industrial fans for the gym.

Concerns were raised about the lack of blinds or curtains on large windows in common areas, with recommendations to install blackout curtains in both shared and private spaces to help block the sun and reduce temperatures. On the main compound, access to a single cooling station was reportedly limited to 10 individuals during 15-minute movement periods. In the minimum-security unit, people could access air-conditioned common areas, but were not permitted available preventative measures, such as leaving the pod doors open to circulate air or return to their living units or access the airconditioned areas after evening security count. While individuals in the maximum-security unit had access to two cooling stations, which was appreciated, it was reported to CAEFS that windows were broken in their living units and could not be opened. Maintenance reportedly advised that the required parts to repair the window mechanisms were no longer available. Additionally, the lights in the units' common areas were left on throughout the day, increasing heat levels. People in Pod 3 expressed concern that the heating system in their unit may still be active.

Discussion: The IMT confirmed that individuals must purchase their own fans, estimated at \$27, and described this as a longstanding national policy requiring approval beyond the institution due to concerns about CSC's use of public, taxpayer funds. The IMT stated cooling stations were intended to be accessible during all movement periods, including work, school, and evenings, and suggested the memo was misinterpreted. CAEFS noted that people were being asked to leave cooling stations during these times and recommended clarifying what "movement time" means in this instance.

The IMT also cited security concerns with keeping MSU pod doors open and allowing access to common areas after evening count. The IMT suggested cooling stations were underused, which CAEFS shared did not align with their firsthand observations or reports from incarcerated individuals. The IMT agreed to explore blackout curtains but raised security concerns about window coverings in common areas. They also acknowledged receipt of the



Inmate Committee's proposal to purchase industrial fans. In maximum security, the IMT said the issue of heat in one pod was not raised by pod reps and that loaner fans are being provided to those without one.

Law & Policy:

Section 12 of the Charter: Everyone has the right not to be subjected to any cruel and unusual treatment or punishment

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

CCRR s. 83(1): the Service shall, to ensure a safe and healthful penitentiary environment, ensure that all applicable federal health, safety, sanitation and fire laws are complied with in each penitentiary and that every penitentiary is inspected regularly by the persons responsible for enforcing those laws.

CAEFS' Recommendations: GVI and CSC more broadly has a responsibility to implement a high/extreme heat protocol that meet the health and well-being needs of the incarcerated population. This protocol should be created in collaboration with appropriate public health authorities and incarcerated individuals, and be aligned with the CCRA and CCRR. Unlike in the community, incarcerated people cannot leave this extremely hot environment, and the temperature people are being subjected to pose immediate health and safety risks.

Affordability of Hygiene Products & Availability of Essential Items

Description: Individuals reported that the \$7 biweekly hygiene stipend is insufficient to meet basic needs, particularly given stagnant wages and rising prices. One bottle of sunscreen costs nearly \$14, requiring multiple days of work for an individual to complete to purchase, absent of any additional hygiene costs/needs. Most shampoos and conditioners exceed \$7 each.

Toothpaste issued through stores was reported to be smaller than before, with no increase in distribution frequency—leaving some without enough for twice-daily brushing. All toothpaste available through the canteen exceeds \$7, and floss is reportedly unavailable. People also reported ongoing barriers accessing additional menstrual products, which continue to require referrals through health care or individual purchasing if your need exceeds the standard issued amount. The only tampons available through the canteen are priced at \$10.96.

Discussion: The IMT confirmed that the \$7 stipend is set at the national level. They committed to looking into the reported lack of floss and attributed the smaller toothpaste tubes to “shrinkflation.” Regarding menstrual products, the IMT stated that 24 items are issued per person monthly, and additional products require a health care assessment. They were unaware of how the 24-item limit was determined.

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



CCRR s. 83 (2) The Service shall take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of every [incarcerated person] and that every [incarcerated person] is: [...] (c) provided with toilet articles and all other articles necessary for personal health and cleanliness

CCRA Section 86: The Service shall provide every [incarcerated person] with (a) essential health care.

CAEFS' Recommendations: Incarcerated individuals are consistently unable to afford essential hygiene items necessary for their health and well-being. The high cost of products such as sunscreen and toothpaste raises serious concerns about long-term health outcomes and the CSC's commitment to treating incarcerated people with dignity. Additionally, the decision to limit access to 24 menstrual products per month appears arbitrary and is inconsistent with the federal government's recognition that menstrual products are basic health necessities. The principle that individuals in prison retain all rights except those necessarily restricted by incarceration is enshrined in the law, and ensuring that all federally incarcerated people have reliable and affordable access to essential hygiene products is foundational for their dignity, health, and cleanliness— in both the short and long term.

Dental Care: Canadian Dental Care Plan

Description: Individuals at GVI who filed their taxes reported receiving notification of eligibility for the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP) and shared this with CAEFS. Many expressed uncertainty about whether incarcerated individuals are eligible for coverage under the CDCP.

People raised ongoing concerns about the affordability of dental services deemed non-essential by CSC, such as cleanings, which are currently not covered. With the introduction of the CDCP, individuals questioned whether coverage for these services will now be available and whether access within institutions will change as a result.

Discussion: The IMT shared that significant national changes are forthcoming to the dental care program for incarcerated individuals. Details will be communicated once available.

Law & Policy:

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.

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

CAEFS' Recommendations: CAEFS welcomes changes to the dental care program for incarcerated individuals. CAEFS encourages CSC to ensure that the dental care available to incarcerated people is aligned with community standards and to consider its overall purpose of rehabilitation and reintegration when determining essential vs. non-essential health care.

