



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

Re: June 2025 Advocacy Visit Follow-Up

July 10, 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 July 8th, 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 June 26th and 27th, 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. Access to Consistent Rehabilitation and Reintegration Supports

Description: CAEFS advocates received numerous reports of individuals experiencing frequent staff turnover in their case management teams at FVI, specifically with their primary rehabilitation and reintegration supports such as primary workers (PWs) and institutional parole officers (IPOs). An individual at FVI provided her consent to share that she has had seven primary workers in the past six months, and that she has experienced increased anxiety and fear surrounding progress made on her correctional plan and her ability to cascade down security classifications due to these consistent changes.

Individuals shared with advocates that they feel both frustrated and confused by frequent changes to their case management teams, and reported feeling concerned about the impacts of PW and IPO turnover in their access to correctional programming as well as conditional release at the earliest possible opportunity.

People also reported feeling pressure to build relationships quickly as they feel different reporting styles and different relationships with PWs and IPOs can alter Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) reporting, which can negatively impact numerous aspects of a person's life and length of incarceration, from security classification and access to programming, to their ability to achieve conditional release.

Advocates were also made aware that people feel less able to meaningfully consult with new PWs and IPOs, as they reportedly do not want to appear difficult and have this negatively captured in their paperwork.



Discussion: The IMT stated that the frequency of change in case management teams is not the norm, nor is it desired. IMT said they encourage people to build relationships and meet with their case management teams regularly, and that IMT are supportive of people lowering their security classifications and reintegrating into community at the earliest possible opportunity. Advocates and IMT discussed how people incarcerated at FVI can feel supported in the correctional planning regardless of changes to their case management teams, and how regularly scheduled check-ins through the request process could help with reported consistency issues.

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.

Commissioner's Directive (CD) 700 (Correctional interventions), section 10(5): The Parole Officer will [...] facilitate the [incarcerated person's] reintegration into the community at the earliest possible time while ensuring public and staff safety in all case management decisions.

CD 700, section 9(5): The Manager, Assessment and Interventions/Manager, Intensive Intervention Strategy/Parole Officer Supervisor/Manager, Community Correctional Centre, will [...] ensure the quality control of case management activities.

CAEFS Recommendations: CAEFS encourages FVI to identify ways to promote continuity and consistency in case management, even when changes to an individual's case management team occur, to better align practices with CSC's legislated purpose. It is essential that staff development opportunities do not negatively impact incarcerated individuals or conflict with CSC's overall mandate.

2. Conditions in the Maximum-Security Unit

Description: Individuals classified as maximum-security at FVI continue to report on the overly restrictive conditions of the maximum-security unit.

It was reported to advocates that every person incarcerated in the maximum-security unit is a security level three, which means they have the lowest security level possible for a maximum-security classification. People reported that in spite of this lowered intra-security classification and there reportedly being no incompatibles in either of the pods, the pods in the maximum-security unit are unable to interact with one another, and that there are few opportunities for individuals in maximum-security to engage with medium security for structured activities or events.

Individuals shared that the transition from maximum-security to the medium population in the main compound would feel less daunting if there were more opportunities to engage with the wider population both within maximum and medium securities.

People in maximum security also continue to report on the limited access to Indigenous cultural supports and activities available in the maximum-security unit. Indigenous people in maximum security reported feeling excluded on National Indigenous People's Day as the only celebration they had access to on that day was a hotdog BBQ.



Individuals reported wanted to attend more cultural events with the main compound, especially sweat lodges and Indigenous cultural events and activities.

Individuals also shared with advocates that the maximum-security population cannot purchase beading supplies, and that they can only receive beading supplies through the Elder designated for the maximum-security unit; however, these finished pieces must reportedly be returned to the Elder or placed on the individual's personal effects, as they are purchased through hobby craft and cannot be sold or given to family.

Individuals also reported limited access to mental health supports in the maximum-security unit, and that this looks like limited activities available for people on their pods, limited access to mental health supports from healthcare, and limited access to CSC behavioural counsellors.

Discussion: IMT said that nearly every person in the maximum-security unit at FVI is up for an institutional security level review and will hopefully be exiting maximum-security and entering medium security. IMT also said that they would consider additional opportunities for inter-pod activities and that this can be discussed with both the maximum-security staff and individuals in maximum security. IMT concluded by saying they will follow up on the other reported issues in maximum security via letter.

Law/Policy:

CCRA, section 4(c): The Service uses the least restrictive measures consistent with the protection of society, staff members and people who are incarcerated.

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 80: The Service shall provide programs designed particularly to address the needs of Indigenous [people who are incarcerated].

CCRA, section 86(1): The Service shall provide every inmate with (a) essential health care; and (b) reasonable access to non-essential health care.

CD 702 (Indigenous [Incarcerated Persons]), section 6(g): The Institutional Head will promote and facilitate regular traditional ceremonies, including smudging with ceremonial medicines.

CAEFS Recommendations: CAEFS appreciates IMT's willingness to both listen and respond to the identified needs of people incarcerated in the maximum-security unit at FVI.

There is a mass incarceration of Indigenous people in maximum-security units across Canadian penitentiaries designated for women. CAEFS advocates for both closure of these units and for alternatives to custody in a penitentiary be prioritized for Indigenous and racialized women and gender-diverse people under federal sentence in Canada. CAEFS also encourages CSC to focus on the Creating Choices philosophies of empowerment, support, and person-centered care in its administration of the material conditions of incarceration to people of all security classifications, and to express compassion for people living within the maximum unit, which is an immensely challenging environment for individuals.



3. Access to Conditional Release

Description: CAEFS advocates again received reports on the challenges to accessing the continuum of release at FVI.

Individuals shared with advocates that there are no work release opportunities available at the penitentiary and shared that people continue to feel economically marginalized because of their incarceration.

People reported that the time between when they are approved for an Escorted Temporary Absence (ETA), and the time they leave the penitentiary on an approved ETA, feels long and as though they are waiting to access the community for months after their approval.

Several people reported their IPOs telling them to postpone their Parole Board of Canada hearings due to delayed access to psychological assessments.

People also reported wanting more reintegration support as there is reportedly no longer a reintegration support worker at FVI. Advocates were informed that making connections with community supports is challenging as people who are incarcerated have limited resources, such as no access to internet and having to spend money on phone calls to community organizations that are not on FVI's common access list.

Discussion: IMT said that this topic has been previously discussed in post-advocacy visit meetings, and that the Assistant Warden of Interventions will respond to CAEFS advocates in their June response letter.

Law/Policy:

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 [incarcerated people] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community.

CCRA, section 5: 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 (a) the care and custody of [incarcerated people]; (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 [incarcerated persons] 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: Ensuring consistent access to temporary absences including work releases aligns with CSC's legislated purpose, as conditional release provides the strongest opportunity for successful reintegration. The Parole Board of Canada emphasizes that gradual, structured release—known as the continuum of release—is the most effective approach to community reintegration.

4. Access to Supports for Incarcerated People with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

Description: At the June advocacy visit, people reported their concerns for how individuals with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) manage and are treated within the penitentiary environment.



Individuals noted that peers with FAS experience challenges to understanding correctional planning and institutional rules, and that the symptoms of their FAS can impact the progress made on their correctional planning.

People reported that often FAS symptoms are conflated with institutional behaviour, and people incarcerated at FVI have reportedly been negatively impacted by receiving charges or having their security classification increased due to their FAS symptoms.

Individuals at FVI identified increased training opportunities for both CSC staff and the incarcerated population at FVI regarding FAS and how to support individuals with FAS who are incarcerated.

Discussion: FVI's Chief of Healthcare suggested having a healthcare-led information session on FAS for the FVI population. IMT and CAEFS advocates discussed the different ways someone with FAS can seek support from the penitentiary to meet their healthcare needs.

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

CD 800 (Health services), section 11: All institutional staff/contractors (including those in Community Correctional Centres) will: (a) inform a health care professional of the condition of any [incarcerated person] who appears to have a physical or mental health concern, whether or not the [incarcerated person] identifies a health concern (b) relay an [incarcerated persons'] request for health services to a health care professional in a timely manner.

CAEFS Recommendations: CAEFS supports the provision of healthcare in-community in all possible instances and encourages FVI to seek patient-centered and trauma-informed healthcare external to the institution as a best practice aligned with the least restrictive measures. Considering the CSC's responsibility to provide safe and humane custody to people in federal penitentiaries, and where those same people are reliant on penitentiary staff and contractors to provide health services, referrals, emergency care, timeframes etc., it is incumbent on CSC employees to center the dignity and care of these individuals.

5. Representation of Population Needs to Institutional Management

Description: Individuals of all security classifications reported on the limited opportunities available to represent the diverse needs of the incarcerated population at FVI to institutional management.



Individuals in the minimum security reported wanting more opportunities to engage with committees in the main compound, and individuals in the maximum-security reported feeling excluded from committee involvement due to their security classification. People in both security classifications expressed interest in increased opportunities to represent the needs of people in different security classifications to management.

Individuals in the main compound suggested house representatives as a paid institutional employment position to inform management of the conditions of confinement, such as mold or broken windows, and advocate for the needs of specific houses, such as Pathways and the medical house.

Discussion: IMT informed advocates that the Institutional Head is conducting town halls in both the minimum and security securities at FVI. These townhalls are an opportunity for people in both security classifications to connect directly with institutional management to voice their concerns.

IMT shared that it is challenging to have house representatives as paid positions, and that they have already tried having an “Inmate Wellness Committee” representative in maximum security, but reported this position to be unsuccessful.

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.

CCRA, section 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.

CCRA, section 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.

CAEFS Recommendations: Peer-led committees are an essential element of the Creating Choices model of incarceration. These committees foster a culture of empowerment, democratic participation, and shared responsibility. CAEFS encourages the IMT to continue engaging with all peer-led committees to ensure that the diversity of voices of incarcerated individuals are meaningfully included in decisions that affect them.

6. Impacts of Peer Allegations in Correctional Service of Canada Reporting

Description: People reported feeling as though unsubstantiated peer allegations are being included in their CSC paperwork and that these allegations are impacting their ability to progress on their correctional plan and access conditional release.

Individuals reported feeling as though anyone can make factually incorrect accusations to CSC staff at any given time, and that the individual receiving the allegations is negatively impacted, regardless of whether the claims are substantiated or not.



The negative mental health impacts and the fear of faulty information being used in correctional decision-making was shared by individuals at this advocacy visit.

Discussion: IMT confirmed that peer information is tested prior to being treated as intelligence. IMT also said they encourage people to put in requests and engage in the file correction process if they feel information is factually inaccurate in their CSC reporting.

Law/Policy:

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 [incarcerated people] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community.

CCRA, section 4(f): Correctional decisions are made in a forthright and fair manner, with access by the [incarcerated person] to an effective grievance procedure.

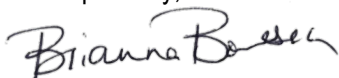
CCRA, section 24(1): The Service shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that any information about an [incarcerated person] that it uses is as accurate, up to date and complete as possible.

CD 566 (Framework for safe and effective correctional environments), section 11: All staff who directly interact with [incarcerated people] will apply the following dynamic security practices while carrying out their responsibilities and/or operational procedures: (d) maintain a consistent approach to addressing inappropriate and negative behaviours through direct and constructive feedback, while encouraging [incarcerated people's] positive behaviours.

CAEFS Recommendations: CAEFS encourages FVI to respond to alleged intelligence in ways that prioritize least restrictive measures, reflect the principles of Creating Choices, and do not erroneously negatively influence a person's institutional paperwork and ability to access reintegration.

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
Lead Advocate, Pacific Regional Advocacy Team, CAEFS

