



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

Re: July 2025 Advocacy Visit Follow-Up

August 26, 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 August 6th, 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 July 24th and 25th, 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. Search and Seizures at FVI

Description: Individuals in all security classifications reported on an 'Institutional Services and Supplies' (ISS) search that took place at FVI the week of July 21st. It was reported to advocates that this type of search occurs annually to remove extra penitentiary-issued items, such as extra institutionally issued clothing like socks and pants, from individuals who are incarcerated.

People in minimum and medium securities described both their cells and collective spaces on the living units as being "torn apart" by the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) employees conducting the search. It was reported that Indigenous cultural and ceremonial items were mishandled and seized during this search, including graduation blankets gifted to individuals by Elders for their graduation from the Pathways Program.

People reported using additional blankets and pillows due to the pain and discomfort experienced because of the fire-retardant mattresses issued in penitentiaries designated for women by the CSC in fall of 2023. Advocates received increased reports of muscle soreness, chronic pain, and sleep deprivation since the removal of these sleep supports during this most recent search.

Individuals reported that healthcare-issued items were also removed during this "ISS" search, and because no seizure tags were issued in any of the security classifications, people reported not knowing how to inquire about their removed items.



Discussion: IMT stated that their inventory was running unusually low and that incarcerated people having extra penitentiary-issued items is contrary to CSC policy and its fire code. IMT informed advocates that graduation blankets are being returned, and that no necessary medical equipment was removed. IMT also shared that individuals can send written requests to the Chief of ISS to have items that were incorrectly seized returned.

Law/Policy:

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.

Corrections and Conditional Release Regulations (CCRR), section 59(1): If an item is seized during a search conducted under any of sections 47 to 64 of the Act, the Service shall, as soon as practicable, notify the owner in writing, if the owner is known, of the seizure.

Commissioner's Directive (CD) 001 (Mission, values and ethics framework of the Correctional Service of Canada, section 2: **Respect:** Respectful behaviours honour the rationality and dignity of persons – their ability to choose their own path, within lawful order, to a meaningful life. A good test of respectful behaviour is treating others as we would like to be treated.

CD 566-9 (Searching of Cells/Rooms, Vehicles and Other Areas), section 29: When seizing articles of religious significance, the Indigenous Elder/Spiritual Advisor, Chaplain or representative of a religious group will be consulted as to proper treatment of the items which is respectful of the individual's beliefs. These articles will be disposed of as outlined in CD 568-5 - Management of Seized Items.

CAEFS Recommendations: CAEFS encourages the CSC to enhance its application of the Creating Choices principles in penitentiaries designated for women, specifically and most relevant to this reported topic, the principles of empowerment, respect and dignity, and supportive environment. At minimum, staff should receive renewed training about the impacts of destructive searches on the mental and emotional wellness of federally sentenced women and gender diverse people.

2. Impacts of Incompatibility Designation

Description: Several people reported receiving incompatibility status with peers within the penitentiary environment, and that this status has a significant negative impact on them and their ability to access programs and services in the penitentiary. Incompatibility refers to “where there are reasonable grounds to believe that an [incarcerated person] poses a threat to the safety and well-being of another [incarcerated person]”¹. As a result of this incompatibility status, the person who receives this “incompatibility” designation from the penitentiary's Security Intelligence Officer (SIO) can experience negative consequences such as being involuntarily transferred to a different federal penitentiary designated for women across the country, where they have no family and limited supports; and/or being held at a higher security classification as both individuals share the same security classification and cannot be in shared spaces.

One individual received a medium security classification but due to an incompatibility status with someone in the medium population; they remained in the maximum-security unit for several months awaiting a transfer decision. Additional people

¹ CD 568-7 (Incompatible [people who are incarcerated]), Definitions.



reported additional challenges to living with an incompatibility designation: the challenges of restricted movement around the penitentiary, limited access to recreation opportunities and events, and receiving limited information regarding the incompatibility designation and feeling confused and unable to pursue mediation or less restrictive alternatives.

Discussion: IMT shared that someone rarely receives an incompatibility designation without attempts at mediation, and that this designation is given by the SIO as a last resort. IMT informed advocates that if the incompatibility status impacts a person's security level, the individual is given a summary of decision for security level review or temporary transfer to a higher security classification.

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 (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.

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

CAEFS Recommendations: CAEFS recommends the CSC provide federally incarcerated people with the skills and opportunities needed to resolve conflict in ways that are person-centered, trauma-informed and reparative, and that meaningfully contribute to the CSC's legislated purpose of the rehabilitation and reintegration. Individuals in need of conflict resolution support should have access to community-based and culturally relevant training over the course of their incarceration to ensure their successful return to community.

3. Conditions in the Minimum-Security Unit

Description: Advocates received reports of access to healthcare challenges, the physical conditions in the minimum-security unit (MSU), and a lack of supports specific to the minimum-security population.

People in the minimum-security unit report experiencing challenges to accessing timely healthcare. They share that they feel increased barrier, as compared to people in the medium security, as the MSU is located outside of the fence from the main compound's primary healthcare. It was explained to advocates that if someone is in medium security they can walk to the healthcare office and request medication or healthcare support in-person; but if someone is in minimum security, they are required to ask the correctional officers at the front desk to call healthcare on their behalf or put in an urgent request and hope it gets to healthcare expeditiously.

As well, people shared that healthcare staff forget to bring the requested medication during regularly scheduled visits to the MSU; healthcare staff leaving before healthcare requests can be made; there is limited confidentiality when accessing in-person healthcare support in the MSU, and there are challenges to privacy as people in the MSU are expected to communicate their healthcare needs with security staff at the front desk, in order to gain access to healthcare staff.

Differently, individuals in the MSU reported that there is no air conditioning in the room where visits are held, and that the heat during the summer months can be difficult for visitors, especially aging family members, young children, and people



with chronic health conditions. It was reported that high temperatures in the V&C can impact the duration of visits, ultimately impacting access to family and community for people in minimum security.

The population also identified the need for increased community reintegration supports, such as additional escorted temporary absence opportunities, financial aid support, support with public transit and being in densely populated spaces post-long-term incarceration. Individuals in minimum security are motivated to transition to community and report that increased access to community reintegration supports creates opportunities to build and maintain positive relationships within community and lessens the anxiety associated with living in community post-incarceration. It was reported that consistent access to community resources and supports during incarceration can increase positive conditional release outcomes, especially for individuals in minimum security.

Discussion: IMT stated that healthcare staff attend the MSU daily and that healthcare access is consistent. IMT reported that guests have access to ice and cold drinks and that the blinds have been used in the MSU to mitigate heat in the Visits and Correspondence room.

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

CCRA, section 4(c.2): The Service ensures the effective delivery of programs to people who are incarcerated, 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.

CAEFS Recommendations: The purpose of the minimum-security unit is to act as a bridge between people under federal sentence and the broader community. Access to essential services such as healthcare, to family, and to community and community resources is critical to the continuum of release and ensuring the successful reintegration of federally incarcerated people to community.

4. Conditions in the Maximum-Security Unit

Description: Advocates continue to receive reports on challenging and harmful conditions in the maximum-security unit at FVI. Most people incarcerated in the maximum-security unit are Indigenous, but access to Indigenous culture and activities on the maximum-security unit is experienced as very limited. Individuals shared that there is minimal access to Elder cultural support since the Elder designated to the maximum-security unit is no longer working at the penitentiary. Advocates were also informed of decreased access to beading and beading supplies as there is currently no Indigenous Wellness Committee at FVI, whose mandate included selling beads and beading supplies to people in all security classifications. It was suggested that an employment position be created in the maximum-security unit to fill bead orders for purchase alongside the Indigenous Liaison Officers for the maximum-security population. It was offered that this position would ensure access to culture is continued for people in maximum-security and it would decrease the economic marginalization experienced by people who are unable to sell their beadwork due to being labelled as “hobby craft”.



People also reported feeling tired of advocating for increased programming, activities, and supports in the maximum-security unit, and referenced a proposal that was submitted to the maximum-security unit's Inter-Disciplinary Team (IDT) six months prior, but that was never responded to, and no feedback was provided. Though the desire to increase activities and opportunities for people in maximum-security to build community was continually mentioned to CAEFS during this visit, people do not feel that their voices are being heard procedurally and feel apathetic about the institution's care about their concerns.

Lastly, it was reported that people in maximum-security have limited opportunities to meet and familiarize themselves with their case management teams. This decreased access to case management supports due to being incarcerated in maximum-security unit can have negative impacts on both correctional planning and cascading security classifications. Individuals reported putting in written requests to see their institutional parole officers and/or primary workers but reported these requests go unanswered.

Discussion: IMT asked advocates to encourage people in maximum security to think creatively about the types of activities, programs, and trainings they would like access to, and submit proposals to the IDT. IMT also encouraged people in maximum security to share proposal ideas with the Inmate Wellness Committee. IMT informed advocates that prospective Indigenous Wellness Committee representatives have been approved by the penitentiary, and that the population vote will be held shortly. IMT also shared that people in maximum-security can purchase craft items, including beads and beading supplies from the Inmate Wellness Committee.

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].

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 receives consistent reports of similar challenges in maximum security units, and advocates for the closure of these units. Indigenous people and people with mental health considerations form the consistent majority of who becomes kept in maximum security units, and these units are very harmful to the mental, emotional, and physical wellness of women and gender diverse people. While maximum security units are in use, CAEFS 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.

5. Aging in Custody



Description: People reported a number of challenges to aging in custody, including that the majority of the living units in the main compound (medium security) do not have accessible bathrooms, and that increased mobility supports in the units are needed. Advocates were told that the demand for Living Unit #1, known as the “healthcare house”, is high due to its accessible bathroom and accessibility modifications.

It was reported to advocates that the healthcare hired to provide 24/7 nursing care to one of FVI’s aging residents is inconsistent. Individuals reported that the healthcare provider is arriving late and leaving early, which is negatively impacting those in the shared living space. It was also reported that individuals with dementia need support during all portions of the day, including while at their penitentiary employment.

Individuals in the medium and minimum security reported the need for increased vocational training suited for people who are aging. Advocates were told that the hairdressing course, one of the reportedly more accessible trainings at FVI, has been delayed for months due to complications with finding an instructor.

Discussion: It was suggested that the Lead Advocate contact FVI’s Manager of Healthcare and Rehabilitation Programs and Services to discuss these reported concerns.

Law/Policy:

Canadian Human Rights Act, section 2: The purpose of this Act is to extend the laws in Canada to give effect, within the purview of matters coming within the legislative authority of Parliament, to the principle that all individuals should have an opportunity equal with other individuals to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have and to have their needs accommodated, consistent with their duties and obligations as members of society, without being hindered in or prevented from doing so by discriminatory practices based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics, disability or 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(c.2): the Service ensures the effective delivery of programs to [people who are incarcerated], 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(d): [incarcerated people] retain the rights of all members of society except those that are, as a consequence of the sentence, lawfully and necessarily removed or restricted.

CD 800 (Health Services), section 2(a): the provision of health services to [incarcerated people] in CSC institutions and in the community, in accordance with relevant legislation, professionally accepted standards, CSC policies and practice directives.

CAEFS Recommendations: Aging people represent over 25% of the federal prison population overall, and penitentiary environments are structured for able-bodied people in peak physical health, they are not conducive to the needs of people with age related mental and physical health conditions. Aging people experience adverse differential discrimination by the seemingly neutral policies and practices carried out by the CSC, and CAEFS encourages the CSC to consider alternatives



to custody for individuals as they age, and for age and the passage of time to be more meaningfully be considered in risk assessments which currently keep women and gender diverse people incarcerated as they age.

6. Access to Conditional Release

Description: Advocates continue to receive reports about limited conditional release opportunities at FVI. Individuals reported wanting more escorted temporary absence (ETA) opportunities, specifically for people who are not religious and do not have codependency or substance use challenges as part of their correctional plan.

It was also reported to advocates that people incarcerated at FVI are concerned about the volunteer recruitment process and the length of time potential volunteers are waiting to receive a CSC orientation. It was also reported by the peer-led committees at FVI that not many people are regularly going on ETAs, and that work release opportunities at FVI are needed particularly for individuals in the minimum-security population as they are in the process of transitioning to community and numerous individuals classified as minimum-security have experienced long-term incarceration and as a result, economic marginalization.

Discussion: IMT suggested that the Lead Advocate contact FVI's Assistant Warden of Interventions to discuss these concerns directly, as similar concerns have been raised at previous meetings.

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 escorted temporary absences and 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.

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

