



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

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Re: CAEFS Regional Advocacy Visit, August and September 2025

This letter details the items that were reported to the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) Atlantic Regional Advocacy Team during our visits to Nova Institution for Women (NIFW) in August and September 2025. This letter also includes a summary of the discussion that took place during the meetings on September 28th and October 2, 2025, relevant laws and policies, and CAEFS' positions. Thank you, and we look forward to your response.

August 2025

Access to Employment

Description:

People incarcerated at NIFW continue to express that there are not enough employment positions at NIFW and that they are waiting a long time between applying for a position and receiving a response. People expressed frustration with this ongoing situation and that the outcomes of being unemployed lead to several issues including the inability to earn wages that help pay for purchasing personal items through the canteen and the catalogue and adding funds to enable telephone calls to family – especially children.

Discussion:

Management stated that there is not a lack of employment opportunities at NIFW and maintained that there are plentiful numbers of positions available at the institution. NMT stated that the delays in responses to employment applications are due to two primary issues - one being summer leave/vacations among staff and the Personal Workers (PW) responses to applications. Management offered that an individual might not get a response to every application they submit, but that they should be able to have a conversation with their PW in regard to the status of their application. CAEFS asked for details of how PW caseloads are handled when staff are off on vacation. Management stated that individual PWs are expected to have someone follow up with their caseload and that they are responsible for informing the incarcerated people on their caseload of who they can reach out to in the absence of their PW. However, no other CSC employee has access to the PWs mailboxes and if requests and/or employment applications are submitted while a PW is away, these items will not be answered until after the PW returns.



Law & Policy

CCRA S.3 The purpose of the federal correctional system is to contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by carrying out sentences imposed by courts through the safe and humane custody and supervision of [incarcerated persons]; and assisting the rehabilitation of [incarcerated persons] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community.

CCRA S.4 (c.2) the Service ensures the effective delivery of programs to [incarcerated people], 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 S.77 Without limiting the generality of section 76, the Service shall provide programs designed particularly to address the needs of female [incarcerated persons]; and

(b) consult regularly about programs for female [incarcerated persons] with

(i) appropriate women's groups, and

(ii) other appropriate persons and groups with expertise on, and experience in working

with, female [incarcerated persons].

Recommendation:

Employment is an essential factor contributing to people's future outcomes, including of course, their successful community reintegration. Its importance should be emphasized in program planning, especially given the socio-economic barriers women and gender-diverse people face. CAEFS recommends that CSC increase opportunities for meaningful employment both within the penitentiary and through conditional release processes such as work-releases.

Access to Family

Description:

It was reported to CAEFS that currently there is no Family Liaison Officer (FLO) at NIFW and this negatively impacts incarcerated individuals' access to maintaining contact with family members, especially children. Specifically, people reported that they were having trouble reaching out to family, especially if they had no money on their phone, and that access through Visits & Communications (V&C) was reported to be only available for legal calls.

Discussion:

Management confirmed that the FLO was out on sick leave but is now back and catching up on work that was missed. NMT stated that the FLO's absence was unexpected and longer in duration than initially expected. Further, the contract provider was asked to provide an alternative, but one was not readily available. Management stated that alternatively, people can speak to their Parole Officers (PO) to arrange family telephone calls.

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;

CCRA S. 28(b)(i) If a person is or is to be confined in a penitentiary, the Service shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that the penitentiary in which they are confined is one that provides them with the least restrictive environment for that person, taking into account...

(b) accessibility to

(i) the person's home community and family

CCRA S. 71(1) In order to promote relationships between [incarcerated person] 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...

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Article 23

1. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Recommendation:

The need for relationships and connectedness to family and community does not end when a person is incarcerated. Providing sufficient access to family is a critical responsibility of the CSC, and all decisions with prisons designated for women should be made in the spirit of facilitating the most broad and accessible access to community and family whenever possible. Accordingly, all decisions at NIFW, and CSC more broadly, should be made in the spirit of facilitating the most broad and accessible access to community and family as possible.

Access to Health Care

Description:

During our August 2025 visit we received multiple reports related to health care including: medication or treatment plans being changed without warning; lack of access to mental health medications, including ADHD medications, with no understanding of why their medications were discontinued. One individual reported that in the transfer from provincial jail to NIFW all their medications were stopped, leaving them severely impacted and dysregulated. Several people also reported a lack of access to dental with multiple cancellations of dental appointments leading to issues of dental pain due to cavities.

Discussion:

In response to these reports management stated that upon arrival at NIFW, they aim to provide continuity of care until individuals can be seen by the NP or physician at NIFW, but that the same medications the individual was receiving prior to federal incarceration might not be provided because they are not contained in the CSC Formulary. When this happens, staff do their best to replace it with an alternative (i.e. Clonazepam instead of Lorazepam). NMT stated that they have not had any reports of medications being totally discontinued. Regarding issues related to dental care, NMT disclosed that some dental clinics have been cancelled due to the dentist calling in sick and that cancellations have increased over the summer. Solutions include the dentist working extra shifts when they are available. NMT offered that currently they are working on a project to improve timelines regarding the dental waitlist.



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

Recommendation:

It is incumbent on CSC to center the dignity and care of individuals in your care and custody. CAEFS supports the provision of healthcare in-community in all possible instances and encourages NIFW to seek patient centered and trauma-informed healthcare external to the institution as a best practice aligned with the least restrictive measures.

Physical Conditions of Confinement - Cooling Station**Description:**

CAEFS received reports that the cooling station was only made available once between the July CAEFS-NMT meeting and the CAEFS August advocacy visit. Individuals reported that this access was insufficient and that the time allowed for each living unit, 30 minutes at a time, was inadequate to allay the effects of extreme heat – nausea, exhaustion, frustration. People in the maximum-security expressed surprise that a cooling station was available, as they were not allowed to access it. They also reported that conditions within the unit and individual rooms were extremely hot.

Discussion:

Management stated that the idea for the cooling station was that people would have access to it when temperatures reached 39 or 40 degrees Celsius, and during the timeframe discussed, temperatures did not reach that level. Management stated that they are looking at this process and may re-evaluate the temperature limit. CAEFS advocates asked management how and why the temperature of 39/40 degrees Celsius was decided upon as the limit at which the cooling station would be made available, management stated that this temperature guideline came from the NHQ policy on cooling stations. Management stated that they have received approval to install a filtered and cooled water bottle fill station in the programs building, that they are seeking funding to purchase ice machine, and that darkening curtains have been ordered for the living units. No timeline on when these items will be installed and/or delivered was provided.

Law & Policy:

S.12 Charter of Rights and Freedoms: 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.

Recommendation:

CAEFS encourages NIFW to develop and implement increased extreme heat protocols that consider the rights, health, and wellbeing of the incarcerated population at the institution, in collaboration with appropriate public health authorities and incarcerated people, that is aligned with emerging community and national standards. Further, providing the same extreme heat protocols to all living units at NIFW is important to protecting the health and wellbeing of all the individuals within the institution.

Follow Up on Issues Discussed in July-August 2025

Removal of Window Stoppers

Management reported that the window stoppers are still on houses 1-4 and metal screens on the bottom windows in living unit one. Maintenance Services has approved the removal of the screens from living unit one but the removal of the window stoppers has not been approved. Management was not able to provide a timeframe on when this would happen.

Double Bunking

Management stated that shared accommodation is “here to stay” due to increased number of transfers from other institutions and increased population. NIFW rated capacity is 102 and current population is 113 with two new individuals arriving last week. Every living unit now has two double bunks, and individuals in living units are preemptively asked to volunteer to double bunk and are allowed to choose to share a room with someone they are comfortable/friendly with. Management stated that this is not an isolated issue related to NIFW, as many institutions around the country are experiencing similar issues. CAEFS asked what solutions are being investigated to alleviate the increase in population and management stated that solutions might include modular houses, fences around minimum units and transferring individuals to empty living units in male institutions to assist with this issue.

September 2025

Restricted Movement in Maximum Security Unit

Description:

CAEFS has received reports related to restricted movement within the maximum-security unit, by way of modified movement schedules divided by pod, and cells. What this means is that people who are already confined to a maximum-security unit are then further segregated by having to spend many hours each day in their cells, rotating time between individuals on the unit. It has been reported that modified movement has been taking place for 3 weeks and noted that movement times are often impacted by mealtimes and count, further restricting one's time spent out of their cell. One individual reported having less than 4 hours per day away from their cell.

CAEFS advocates noted that the modified movement schedule impacted their ability to meet with individuals in maximum-security and impeded the time individuals had to speak with an advocate. In addition to a modified movement schedule, double bunking also occurs within the maximum-security unit. It is known to us at CAEFS that implications to the overall wellbeing of those living under these restrictive conditions are significant. Individuals were also noted to express empathy for those living in maximum-security, who experience significant mental health challenges, vocalizing “this is not the place for them”.

Discussion:



Management stated that incarcerated people who don't have any interpersonal issues are getting well over the allotted time outside of their cells, disagreeing with the experience that individuals are segregated by way of the modified movement schedule, and explaining that everyone is getting out for the allotted time permitted to them. Management continued stating that the CM works closely with the maximum-security population to facilitate mediation between incarcerated persons, and reevaluates on a weekly basis, however, explains that sometimes the behaviors continue, reverting to modified movement. Management stated that modified movement is a safety measure, and alternative to placement in the SIU, or involuntary transfer. Management stated that Nova has behavioral interventionists and mental health workers on the unit "all the time".

Law and Policy:

CCRA 4(c)

The Service uses the least restrictive measures consistent with the protection of society, staff members and [incarcerated people];

CCRA 70

The Service shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that penitentiaries, the penitentiary environment, the living and working conditions of [persons in prison] and the working conditions of staff members are safe, healthful and free of practices that undermine a person's sense of personal dignity.

Recommendation:

Movement restriction schedules and practices are increasingly common within penitentiaries designated for women, and CAEFS strongly cautions that this practice produces the same adverse effects of segregation. Prisons designated for women must provide an empowering and holistic environment, and thus we strongly recommend that the CSC cease this practice and develop alternative responses that align with Creating Choices and the evidence-based needs of women and gender diverse people in prison. CAEFS also encourages the creation of health-centered approaches to managing maximum-security units which consider the disproportionate number of people with complex mental health who are classified as maximum-security.

Double Bunking

Description:

CAEFS received reports that people are currently being double bunked within both the maximum security and general population. Though incarcerated persons are now being involved in the decision making of who they are sharing a cell with, which they appreciate, overpopulation remains a concern. The practice of double bunking is widely experienced as a violation of a person's sense of safety and wellness, and has adverse mental, physical and emotional impacts. CAEFS asked management of their plan to address this capacity issue.

Discussion:

Management stated that the current population at NIFW is 110, however, they have since increased their capacity to be set at 126. Management stated that the percentage increase of incarcerated women and gender diverse folks was unforeseen and is a conversation that is taking place at a national level.

Management informed that NIFW will be receiving an additional single-story modular building, housing an additional 10 double-bunked rooms, for those designated General Population. Management stated that the SLE and



maximum security units are at capacity. Management stressed that double bunking is a routine practice moving forward and stated that they now use the language shared accommodations.

Law and Policy:

CCRA 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.

CCRA 70 (7):

Population management strategies must include single occupancy when feasible and ensure that double bunking remains a temporary accommodation measure.

Recommendation:

CAEFS encourages CSC to consider broadly the psychological and emotional implications due to physical conditions of confinement, particularly double bunking of women and gender-diverse people. CAEFS recommends that CSC explore all possible alternatives to custody, lowering the amount of federally incarcerated women and gender-diverse people.

Access to Health Care

Description:

CAEFS Representatives heard of several reports of individuals experiencing challenges accessing adequate and appropriate health care at NIFW. It was also noted that all dental appointments were cancelled and rescheduled, resulting in appointments being delayed, as well as urgent requests remaining unanswered.

Discussion:

Management stated that since March of 2025, Nova has had 24/7 nursing staff availability and has not received any complaints regarding unmet healthcare needs. This was followed up by sharing that there was one recent report to the OCI regarding healthcare concerns; however, file review had shown that multiple interventions were taken for this individual. Management stated that it may be a person's perception that they are not receiving the health care they want.

Regarding dental care, Management acknowledges that throughout the summer months, there was an increase in cancellations of dental clinics. This issue has been addressed with the dentist, who confirmed they will be able to fulfill their contract obligations moving forward. Management also explained that care is prioritized with those who have urgent needs, which may cause delays for those awaiting less urgent procedures.

Law and Policy:

CCRA 86(1)

The Service shall provide every inmate with

- (a) essential health care; and
- (b) reasonable access to non-essential health care.

CD 800



To provide offenders with efficient, effective health services that encourage individual responsibility, promote healthy reintegration and contribute to safe communities.

Recommendation:

CAEFS appreciates the ongoing oversight NIFW has maintained regarding healthcare delivery. We recommend continuing to ensure that all individuals receive the most appropriate level of care possible, and that contracted healthcare providers consistently meet the standards and obligations set out in their agreements.

Access to Community Reintegration

Description:

CAEFS heard of several reports in which individuals have had minimal or inconsistent access to meetings with their IPO's, as well as barriers to accessing parole in general. Incarcerated individuals described not having appointments with their IPO for several months, despite approaching parole eligibility. Several individuals report having their recommendations for parole revoked at the last minute, feeling as though they did not receive a clear explanation of the factors behind this decision.

Discussion:

CAEFS asked management to explain why support for parole would be revoked, or why someone would be asked to postpone their parole hearing. Management stated that without knowing the details of an individual case, they could not comment as to why support for parole would be postponed or revoked. Management explained that all postponement agreements are reviewed by the acting Warden of Interventions and invited CAEFS to speak with them directly regarding individual cases, to which consent has been provided.

Law and Policy:

CCRA 3(b)

assisting the rehabilitation of offenders and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community.

CCRA 100

The purpose of conditional release is to contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by means of decisions on the timing and conditions of release that will best facilitate the rehabilitation of offenders and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens.

CD 700 - 10(e)

parole officers will facilitate the reintegration of [incarcerated people] into community at the earliest possible date while ensuring public and staff safety in all case management decisions.

Recommendation:

CAEFS recommends ensuring all individuals have consistent and frequent access to their IPO's and that any changes to support for release be communicated clearly and with adequate explanation.

Follow Up – Access to Translation and Interpretation

Description:



Since fall of 2023, CAEFS representatives have been speaking with an individual at NIFW, who has had barriers to accessing interpretation services. She has reported numerous challenges in understanding her eligibility for parole, and details of release planning.

Upon CAEFS visit to Nova Scotia September 16-17, Advocates learned that interpretation services have now been arranged during individual meetings with their IPO. CAEFS expressed appreciation for this positive step and encouraged a proactive approach moving forward to support individuals who require interpretation or translation services.

Discussion:

Management stated that they were proactive in this individual's situation, but as the complexities of her case increased, formal translators were contracted. Management stated that translation was offered at different times; however, the individuals stated they did not require it. This discussion was followed up with Management stating that there were an Arabic-speaking staff member and an incarcerated person that had provided support with translation services in the past.

Law and Policy:

CCRA 27(4)

An [incarcerated person] who does not have an adequate understanding of at least one of Canada's official languages is entitled to the assistance of an interpreter

- (a) at any hearing provided for by this Part or the regulations; and
- (b) for the purposes of understanding materials provided to the [incarcerated person] pursuant to this section.

CD 767 9(a)

ensure services and interventions are in line with paragraph 4(g) of the CCRA, specifically with respect to ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic differences, and are responsive to the needs of visible minorities and other groups, as they relate to the reintegration of ethnocultural [incarcerated persons]

Recommendation:

CAEFS recommends that interpretation services continue to be provided to any incarcerated person who does not speak either of Canada's official languages while completing a federal sentence.

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,
 Shelby Thompson
 Lead Advocate, Atlantic Regional Advocacy Team, CAEFS

