



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

Re: August 2025 Advocacy Visit Follow-Up

September 22nd, 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 September 5th, 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 August 28th and 29th, 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. Financial Literacy and Agency

Description: People reported that the administration of finances by the penitentiary inhibits the development of people's financial literacy skills over the course of incarceration, and that the financial statements produced by the penitentiary are confusing. Individual's financial information, such as payments for employment, their current funds, and savings are presented in ways that are unclear and feel inaccessible to them.

It was also reported that people who are newly incarcerated at FVI feel overwhelmed by the penitentiary's financial processes. People reported the administration of finances feels like an additional barrier to entering the penitentiary environment and that limited access to income during the first few weeks of incarceration creates challenges to connecting to their families and communities, because people are required to use only funds transferred into their penitentiary accounts to make calls.

People in the medium compound also shared that receiving their financial statement from the penitentiary on Thursdays can negatively impact their ability to purchase canteen items on the following Friday. If there is an error on the Thursday statement, people in the medium compound have one hour, between 3pm and 4pm on Thursdays, to have a social programs officer email the finance department to have the error corrected by the next day. If this does not happen, the individual may not be able to purchase canteen items on Friday, reducing their access to important items such as ibuprofen and acetaminophen.

The finance department is reportedly not physically accessible, due to the clustering of services on the shared institutional property with federal penitentiaries designated for men. People reported having to rely on sending paper requests to the finance department, and that multiple requests are required to schedule a meeting to discuss financial errors or to better understand the penitentiary payment system.



People offered that earning between \$5.25 and \$6.90 per day for full-time employment with the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) creates barriers to saving money while in prison, and in transitioning to community, and that saving money over the course of incarceration feels impossible due to the low pay levels.

Advocates also learned that Annex B of Commissioner's Directive 730 ([Incarcerated Persons program assignments and [incarcerated people]] payments lists "a high level of accountability" as the criteria to receive the highest possible pay within the penitentiary, Level A pay of \$6.90/day. Because of this criterion, people who are wrongfully convicted and maintain their innocence offer that they cannot receive the highest level of pay with the CSC.

Discussion: IMT agreed that the format of the financial statements given to the FVI population is challenging to navigate. IMT said they will set up a discussion with finance to discuss the creation of financial resources specific to the financial statements received by the population.

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 [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.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, section 76: The Service shall provide a range of programs designed to address the needs of [incarcerated people] and contribute to their successful reintegration into the community.

CAEFS Recommendations: CAEFS appreciates IMT's willingness to develop resources in response to needs identified by the population. CAEFS encourages FVI to create these resources in collaboration with FVI's peer-led committees. CAEFS also encourages the CSC nationally to evaluate the systemic and rehabilitative impacts of compensating federally incarcerated individuals at daily rates that are significantly less than the hourly minimum wage in all provinces and territories. CSC should extend the rights and protections guaranteed to Canadian workers to incarcerated people who are employed within federal penitentiaries.

2. Access to Lower Security Classifications

Description: People reported that they are being kept for long periods of time in more restrictive (higher) security classifications because support is being withdrawn by Institutional Parole Officers (IPO) prior to an institutional security level review, without adequate notice or discussion between an individual and an IPO to address the decision making. Individuals reported feeling surprised to learn of changes of parole officer support within a week of their scheduled security review, and shared feeling both upset and demoralized by not having prior discussions with their CMT or having the chance to co-develop a structured plan to address any perceived risks associated with a lower security classification.

Other individuals shared that they are being 'interim' placed at a higher security classification without access to least restrictive measures, informal resolution, or mediation. It was reported that individuals are being transferred to the maximum-security unit at FVI based on allegations received by the Security Intelligence Officer. Despite requesting urinalysis and/or body scans to address these allegations, people have been denied access to both. Due to this interim placement, people reported experiencing disruptions to their correctional programming and reduced access to both



penitentiary and community supports, such as Elder support. Reintegrative opportunities are also negatively impacted by interim security placements, with the cancellation of conditional release opportunities such as Escorted Temporary Absences due to the increased security classification.

Discussion: IMT made recommendations for advocates to follow up with FVI's Deputy Warden or the Assistant Warden of Interventions (AWI). IMT assured advocates that security level reviews begin with a review of procedural safeguards, and that individuals are aware of the recommendations of their CMT.

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

CCRA, section 28(c): 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 [...] (c) the availability of appropriate programs and services and the person's willingness to participate in those programs.

CCRA, section 30(2): The Service shall give each [person] reasons, in writing, for assigning a particular security classification or for changing that classification.

CAEFS Recommendations: CSC must take all reasonable steps to manage perceived risk in the least restrictive manner. When interim placements do occur, CSC must ensure that the person and their legal counsel are given sufficient time to review all relevant documentation in accordance with the principles of procedural fairness. CAEFS continues to call for the closure of maximum-security units in federal prisons designated for women, as their structure and conditions are incompatible with the principles of Creating Choices.

3. Access to Meaningful Relationships

Description: Individuals shared that there are still challenges in FVI related to intimate partner relationships between consenting incarcerated people. Individuals report that they are often denied the ability to cohabitate without any clear reason, and people feel that the institution is often less supportive of relationships that involve gender diverse individuals. In general, many people offered that they would like more access to therapies such as couples counselling. Individuals reported that when they disclose an intimate partner relationship to their IPO and CMT as an effort to be transparent; they are often labelled as "co-dependent", and as a result have limited access to relationship supports.

Discussion: IMT stated that if two people are not residing together, it is due to risk. IMT also said that it is not uncommon for the CSC to have information from one party that they cannot share with the other party. IMT added that double bunking in the maximum-security unit is not done unless there are extenuating circumstances.

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(d): [People who are incarcerated] 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, 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.

CAEFS Recommendations: CAEFS encourages FVI, and the CSC more broadly, to consider both the rehabilitative and fundamental human importance of maintaining meaningful relationships for people incarcerated in Canadian federal penitentiaries. Access to relationship-focused programming and resources — especially, community-based supports, such as gender and trauma-informed counselling services, can support healthy relationships inside and supports the principles of *Creating Choices* and improves reintegration outcomes for the individuals in CSC custody. CAEFS reminds the CSC that all denials of requests to cohabitate must be accompanied by a clear rationale, as per previous Canadian Human Rights Commission decisions related to the matter.

4. Conditional Release: Access to Psychological Assessments

Description: Several individuals in both minimum and medium securities report being on the waiting list to access psychological assessments for over one year. People shared that this assessment is a requirement of the Parole Board of Canada (PBC) for conditional release. People feel nervous that the assessment will not be completed in time for their day parole eligibility dates and fear they will be incarcerated longer because of the wait-times. Individuals on the waitlist suggested having psychological assessment offered online via video conference, as this practice was made widely available during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Discussion: IMT informed advocates that the recruitment of psychologists is a CSC national issue and that conversations are being had at this level to review existing policies and procedures associated with psychologists and psychological assessments. IMT also shared that video-visits are a viable alternative and are being explored.

Law/Policy:

CCRA, section 5(c): 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 the preparation of [incarcerated people] for release.

CCRA, section 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 [incarcerated people] and their reintegration into the community as law abiding citizens.

CAEFS Recommendations: Incarcerated individuals must rely on the CSC to provide timely and essential healthcare and decision making, which is critical for facilitating access to conditional release at the earliest possible opportunity.



CAEFS encourages the CSC to explore additional measures to ensure that delays to psychological assessments do not hinder access to conditional release.

5. Access to Gender-Affirming and Dignity-Preserving Items

Description: Individuals with gender considerations noted in the “Offender Management System” reported being denied penitentiary packs (pen packs), consisting of clothing, shoes, and accessories that align with their gender identity. Individuals who identify as non-binary have requested pen packs with clothing and accessories to meet their individualized gender protocol, but report being denied by the Institutional Head. Individuals reported experiencing gender dysphoria as a result of not having access to gender-affirming items. Numerous demographics within the penitentiary reported needing increased access to gender-affirming and dignity-preserving items. People with life sentences are particularly impacted, having to wear clothing for many more years than short sentenced people, and not having the resources to replace these items via penitentiary purchase mechanisms, such as Amazon.

Individuals who have experienced weight loss also reported limited access to pen packs to meet their new clothing needs. Individuals also shared that having clothing that aligns with their gender needs, that fits their bodies and isn't worn out over time, is dignity preserving and aligned with the principles of Creating Choices. People also expressed the importance of feeling confident and presenting like a community member when on conditional release from the penitentiary.

Discussion: IMT said they can authorize a new penitentiary pack, which includes items such as clothing, shoes, and accessories, when an individual is newly transferred to FVI as the transfer aligns with their gender identity, but that approvals beyond this scope are outside of Institutional Head's authority. IMT added that health services can consider approving specific gender-affirming items, but that new clothing and penitentiary pack items cannot be provided.

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(d): [People who are incarcerated] 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, 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.

Commissioner's Directive 100 (Gender Diverse [Incarcerated People]), section 8 (d)(e): The Institutional Head/District Director will (d) ensure [incarcerated people] have access to external resources and networks that are respectful and reflective of gender diversity; (e) foster behaviours and practices among staff and [incarcerated people] that promote a safe and inclusive environment in institutions, including Community Correctional Centres.



CAEFS Recommendations: The conditions within penitentiaries designated for women need to provide a dignity preserving environment with opportunities for individuals, including gender diverse and life sentenced individuals, to meaningfully develop themselves, and live in an environment that promotes dignity, empowerment, and thus, successful reintegration. CAEFS encourages the 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, especially listening to the needs and ideas of people in the CSC's care and custody.

6. Physical Conditions of Confinement: Extreme Heat

Description: People report on the impacts of the extreme summer temperatures at FVI. Advocates met with people who reported feeling dizzy, having heat-related headaches, and feeling faint due to the hot temperatures in the living units and in spaces accessible to the population at FVI. People also reported not knowing where or when they could access the "cool room" as they reported no notices related to accessing a cool space were provided this summer by the penitentiary. People in minimum-security reported access to family and community challenges as no air conditioning is available in the Visits and Correspondence area in the minimum-security unit at FVI. As a result, there has been a decrease in visits during the hot summer days with their visitors reportedly citing the extreme heat and lack of air conditioning for postponing or cancelling their visit. It was also reported to advocates that air conditioning is only available in the cell where the parent and baby reside as part of the Mother-Child Program, and as a result both parent and baby are spending disproportionate amounts of time in the cell. Individuals shared their concerns related to child development and being confined to a small area due to heat concerns.

Discussion: IMT said they discussed reports of extreme heat with Peer Advocates earlier in the day. IMT stated they plan to have more discussions regarding extreme heat and the impacts of extreme heat at FVI earlier in the year to help mitigate the reported issues this past summer.

Law/Policy:

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, section 12: Everyone has the right not to be subjected to any cruel and unusual treatment or punishment.

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, section 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: FVI and CSC more broadly has a responsibility to keep people safe, which includes managing institutional temperatures. A high/extreme heat protocol should be immediately implemented to 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 temperatures people are being subjected to pose immediate health and safety risks.

7. Conditional Release: Access at the Earliest Possible Opportunity

Description: Individuals at FVI report being encouraged by their IPOs to postpone their day parole hearings with the PBC immediately following their day parole eligibility dates. IPOs are reportedly telling the incarcerated population at FVI that it is not their right to access parole at the earliest possible date, but it is only then that they are “eligible” to access parole. It was reported that IPOs are also withdrawing their support for ETAs but are not providing people with clear instructions on how they can work towards ETAs. People reported feeling like they need to guess the expectations of their IPO in order to access conditional release.

Advocates also received reports of people being approved for day parole by the PBC but being forced to remain at the penitentiary for months after the approval decision because no bed space was arranged by their CMT prior to the hearing. People reported feeling frustrated and discouraged after working hard to receive a positive decision from the PBC, but then having to wait months in the MSU due to special conditions imposed on their day parole by the PBC as no accommodation was previously arranged by their CMT.

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.

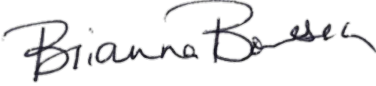
CD 700 (Correctional interventions), section 10(e): parole officers will facilitate the reintegration of [people who are incarcerated] into community at the earliest possible date while ensuring public and staff safety in all case management decisions.

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

