



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

Re: October 2025 Advocacy Visit Follow-Up

November 10th, 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 October 31st, 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 October 23rd and 24th 2025. It also includes our summary of the discussion that took place during the meeting mentioned above, relevant laws and policies, and CAEFS' recommendations.

Please note that, during our advocacy visit, there were reportedly three people incarcerated in the Structured Intervention Units at FVI.

1. Physical Conditions of Confinement: Access to Working Phones

Description: Individuals across all security classifications report ongoing issues with the telephones accessible to the incarcerated population at FVI. Advocates received increased reports of calls being dropped and having poor sound quality, such as static, when people use the living unit phones to connect with family, friends, and community. Incarcerated individuals emphasized that phone calls are a vital way to maintain relationships during incarceration, and that these technical issues contribute to feelings of isolation and disconnection. Additionally, people reported losing some of their limited funds when outgoing phone calls are dropped due to technical problems, and they are still being billed per minute regardless.

It was also reported that the Indigenous Liaison Officers (ILO) do not have working phones in their offices, which is negatively impacting access to this cultural support for Indigenous people at FVI.

The Inmate Wellness Committee and peer advocates report that the institutional phone in the shared Inmate Wellness Committee, peer advocate, and Indigenous Wellness Committee office is also not working. Committee members report using the office phone to collaborate with committee representatives across security classifications.

Discussion: IMT acknowledged this reported issue and said they are experiencing issues with their telephone service provider. IMT shared that upgrades to the telephone infrastructure at FVI will be made within the next year, which they hope will resolve these ongoing phone issues. IMT said there is a temporary phone in the ILO office and provided the phone number to advocates. IMT also said the Manager of Programs at FVI can facilitate communication between security classifications for committee representatives.



Law/Policy:

Corrections and Conditional Release Act (CCRA), section 4(c): The Service uses the least restrictive measures consistent with the protection of society, staff members and [incarcerated people].

CCRA, section 28: 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 an environment that contains only the necessary restrictions, taking into account [...] (b) accessibility to (i) the person's home community and family.

CCRA, section 71(1): In order to promote relationships between [incarcerated people] 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, subject to such reasonable limits as are prescribed for protecting the security of the penitentiary or the safety of persons.

CAEFS Recommendations: A key rationale for establishing regional penitentiaries designated for women was to promote close community and familial contact for federally sentenced women and gender-diverse individuals— a goal clearly articulated in *Creating Choices*. All Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) decisions should be guided by a commitment to facilitating the broadest and most accessible opportunities for connection with community and family, including consistent access to telephone calls for incarcerated persons. Fracturing individuals from their families and communities through incarceration has devastating impacts on federally sentenced women and gender diverse people, in the short, medium, and long-term.

2. Access to Meaningful Human Contact: Structured Intervention Unit

Description: Individuals incarcerated in the Structured Intervention Units (SIUs) at FVI reported that they are not receiving the level of meaningful human contact required under the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* (CCRA). Advocates learned that individuals incarcerated in the SIU are primarily interacting with CSC staff as meaningful human contact, and not their peers. Due to the power imbalance between incarcerated persons and CSC staff— including staff members' authority to issue disciplinary charges— these interactions are not viewed by people incarcerated in the SIU as meaningful human contact. Individuals incarcerated in the SIU expressed a desire for daily opportunities to interact with their peers to fulfill the meaningful human contact requirements set out in the CCRA.

Discussion: IMT reported that when a Threat Risk Assessment is required, it is completed daily to determine whether an individual may interact with others. The IMT indicated that visits between individuals in the SIU and their peers can be arranged in the interview room upon request. The IMT also stated that members of the Inmate Wellness Committee and peer advocates are permitted to meet with individuals incarcerated in the SIU.

Law/Policy:

CCRA, section 3(a): 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 offenders.

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 31(1)(b): The purpose of the structured intervention unit is to provide the [incarcerated person] with an opportunity for meaningful human contact and an opportunity to participate in programs and to have access to services that respond to the [person's] specific needs and the risks posed by the [person].

CAEFS Recommendations: CAEFS advocates to end segregative practices in federal penitentiaries, such as those used in Structured Intervention Units. CAEFS encourages the CSC to consider the profound impacts of segregation on the mental and physical health and wellbeing of incarcerated people, as well as its impacts on the ability of the CSC to fulfill its dual purpose of providing safe and human custody and supervision and for the rehabilitation and reintegration of people in their care.

3. Consultation with Incarcerated Population

Description: During CAEFS' October advocacy visit, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Inmate Wellness Committee requested that advocates discuss with IMT the process through which law and policy consultations occur at FVI. The Inmate Wellness Committee reported that they are not provided with sufficient time to review and provide feedback on Commissioner's Directives (CDs). As representatives of the incarcerated population, the Inmate Wellness Committee emphasized that it is their priority to consult with specific groups within the penitentiary who are directly impacted by proposed changes to CDs. The Inmate Wellness Committee also reported feeling pressured by management to sign off on consultation agreements without adequate opportunity for review or meaningful input.

Discussion: IMT stated that they will follow up with the Inmate Wellness Committee to discuss ways to improve communication and facilitate more effective consultation on CSC policy. The IMT noted that directives from CSC National Headquarters sometimes require a rapid turnaround for feedback on CDs and acknowledged that this poses challenges for both staff and incarcerated individuals.

Law/Policy:

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.

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: CAEFS appreciates the IMT's willingness to collaborate and seek input from the Inmate Wellness Committee at FVI. CAEFS encourages the CSC broadly to expand opportunities for incarcerated individuals to provide feedback and participate in consultations on the laws and policies governing the federal penitentiary system that most directly affect them.

4. Impacts of Security Intelligence Information on Security Level Reviews

Description: Individuals reported challenges related to the use of information received by the Security Intelligence Office (SIO) in security level reviews, noting that such information can lead to inaccurate assessments of risk and subsequent



increases in security classification. Individuals indicated that terms such as “information of unknown reliability” and “information of believed reliability” are often referenced in reviews and used to justify higher security classifications. People expressed concern that there are few effective mechanisms to challenge this type of information and that security level decisions appear to be based on allegations and “a balance of probabilities” rather than verified facts.

Individuals also shared that it is widely understood within the institution that inaccurate or misleading information can be intentionally circulated to cause lateral harm against incarcerated people, and that this risk is not adequately considered by FVI staff. Further, individuals reported that when information about them is provided by peers, they would like the opportunity to present their perspective during the investigation process, before such information is recorded in a manner that presents it as factual.

Similarly, individuals expressed uncertainty regarding the processes available to challenge or overturn information received by the SIO concerning alleged involvement in the drug subculture within the institution.

Discussion: IMT stated that assessments of an individual’s involvement in the drug subculture at FVI are based on multiple factors, and that information deemed to be from a “believed reliable source” is tested and reviewed by the Security Intelligence Office (SIO). The IMT indicated that the SIO is open to meeting with individuals to discuss concerns related to labelling and that case management teams are also available to receive feedback. The IMT further suggested that individuals submit requests for file corrections when information recorded about them is factually inaccurate.

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 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. CAEFS encourages FVI to respond to alleged intelligence in ways that prioritize the least restrictive measures, reflect the principles of Creating Choices, and ensures that individuals’ rights to due process, a right maintained during incarceration, is not violated.

5. Impacts of Incarceration on Financial Stability

Description: Individuals reported that funds are being withdrawn from their CSC financial accounts by the finance department at FVI without consent or prior approval by the individual. Advocates were told that financial errors such as the unauthorized removal of funds have drastic impacts on an individual’s ability to purchase critical canteen items for several weeks, such as acetaminophen. It was also reported that requests sent to finance to correct financial errors will often go unanswered, and that people are required to send multiple requests and use the grievance procedure to have their funds returned.

Advocates also received reports of the CSC not accurately recording the number of hours worked by incarcerated people, resulting in both unpaid shifts and negative reporting associated with their CSC employment.



Concerns were raised regarding access to Level A pay (\$6.90/day), which requires “a high level of accountability” under Annex B of Commissioner’s Directive 730. This criterion prevents individuals who maintain their innocence from receiving Level A pay.

People emphasized that the low daily earnings create significant barriers to preparing for community reintegration, particularly as canteen prices and third-party purchase costs continue to rise, making it effectively impossible to save funds during incarceration.

Discussion: IMT suggested the development of financial resources by the Inmate Wellness Committee to respond to this population-identified need. IMT stated that the role of finance is to administer funds and that additional supports to address financial literacy and financial education needs should be population-driven. IMT also shared that the Citizens Advisory Committee is interested in increasing the rate of pay for incarcerated people.

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(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 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.

6. Access to Conditional Release

Description: Individuals reported experiencing significant delays—sometimes waiting several months—to participate in approved Escorted Temporary Absences (ETAs) that are directly linked to their correctional plans. People expressed interest in a broader range of ETA opportunities to support their reintegration such as escorted outings to the library, bank, or to attend courses at the University of the Fraser Valley, which is located adjacent to the penitentiary.

Individuals also reported being informed by institutional parole officers that they must wait a minimum of six months before reapplying for an ETA following a denial. This six-month timeline is not supported in law and policy, and if understood as process could negatively impact a person’s access to the continuum of release and conditional release at the earliest possible opportunity.



Discussion: IMT and CAEFS advocates did not have time during the IMT meeting to discuss this reported concern. IMT said they will address access to conditional release as a reported concern in their response to CAEFS' October systemic advocacy 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.

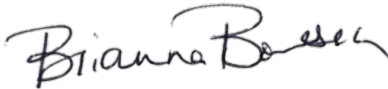
CCRA, section 5: There shall continue to be a correctional service in and for Canada, to be known as the Correctional Service of Canada, which shall be responsible for (a) the care and custody of [incarcerated people]; (b) the provision of programs that contribute to the rehabilitation of [incarcerated 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 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

