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Re: CAEFS Regional Advocacy Visit, October 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) on October 21-22 2025. This letter also includes a summary of the discussion that took place during the meetings on November 30, 2025, relevant laws and policies, and CAEFS' positions. Thank you, and we look forward to your response.

Delays in Receiving Internal and External Mail

Description: It was reported to CAEFS and NIFW management at the Inmate Committee (IC) meeting that there have been delays in receiving mail for people incarcerated in both the general population and in the minimum-security unit. Individuals shared that having their mail delivered a day after it was received at the site, as well as receiving appointment slips late, resulting in missed or delayed appointments. In one reported instance, an individual shared that she received her appointment slip two days after her scheduled appointment.

Discussion: Management explained that currently no mail is being delivered via Canada Post due to the ongoing strike, and that NIFW is receiving couriered parcels only. Regarding internal mail, management acknowledges some delays but ensures mail has been processed. Management stated they have not received any requests related to missed appointments or been informed of the delays but will follow up. CAEFS explained that they became aware of this issue when it was brought forth by a house representative during the October IC meeting.

Law and Policy:

CD s. 85 (13): Under normal circumstances, incoming mail shall be distributed to [incarcerated persons] and outgoing mail forwarded to the Post Office within 24 hours of receipt.

CCRA s. 71(1): In order to promote relationships between [incarcerated persons] 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.



Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that the delivery of mail is tracked and monitored to ensure compliance with legislated delivery timeframes. Alternative notifications methods for time-sensitive appointments should be implemented to maintain timely access to staff, service providers, and community.

Delays in Healthcare – Dental Surgery

Description: CAEFS received reports of delays in dental care, including dental surgery. Individuals reported being given an estimated wait time of 4-6 weeks for an appointment but have now waited months. These delays have reportedly resulted in prolonged pain and challenges for those awaiting care.

Discussion: Management shared that they are limited by the waitlists within the community, and patients should not be given a particular time frame, as the appointments are scheduled by a private clinic external to the prison. Management explained further that all procedures must fall within the Essentials Services Framework and are individually reviewed by the management of health services. If services fall outside of this coverage criteria, individuals should be notified that their procedure has not been approved.

Law and 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.

CCRA s. 86 (2):

The provision of health care under subsection (1) shall conform to professionally accepted standards.

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that NIFW continue to work proactively to minimize delays in access to essential dental care and ensure timely communication with individuals awaiting treatment. Where external wait times affect service delivery, clear updates should be provided so individuals understand the status of their care. Efforts should also be made to explore alternative options or partnerships to reduce prolonged discomfort and maintain continuity of care.

Double Bunking

Description: CAEFS understands from previous meetings that double bunking is likely to persist as a standard practice at NIFW, due to the increasing number of federally incarcerated women and gender-diverse people. CAEFS received reports, however, that individuals are no longer being consulted with as to whom they would like to be double bunked with.

Discussion: Management shared that double bunking placements are determined by the “Offender Management System” (OMS). They noted that preference is facilitated, when possible, but is not always practical logistically. Management shared that they have no single cells currently available, and that new admissions to NIFW are being double bunked. Management stated that they can reevaluate double bunking placements over time, when possible.

Law and Policy:

CCRA s. 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 s. 70 (7): Population management strategies must include single occupancy when feasible and ensure that double bunking remains a temporary accommodation measure.

CCRA s. 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;

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that CSC explore all possible alternatives to custody, lowering the amount of federally incarcerated women and gender-diverse people. We recommend that, when double bunking is necessary, CSC considers the importance of individual autonomy by involving individuals in the process where possible and taking their preferences and compatibility into account. This approach supports dignity, safety, and respectful living conditions.

Maximum Security Unit and Structured Intervention Unit at Capacity

Description: It was communicated to CAEFS that both the maximum-security unit and Structured Intervention Unit (SIU) are at full capacity.

Discussion: Management shared that as of today, only 1 individual was being held in the SIU, and noted that this number fluctuates daily. Management did however confirm that maximum security was over capacity, and that reclassifications were taking place to combat the overcrowding. Management stated that in this situation, modified routines are used to manage "incompatibles".

Law and Policy:

CCRA s. 4 (c): the Service uses the least restrictive measures consistent with the protection of society, staff members and [incarcerated persons];

CCRA s. 32 (b): 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 [incarcerated person's] specific needs and the risks posed by the inmate.

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that CSC continue to prioritize the use of least restrictive measures while addressing capacity pressures in the maximum-security unit and SIU. Efforts should focus on timely reclassification reviews and alternatives to custody. When modified routines are necessary, care should be taken to ensure individuals continue to have meaningful human contact and equitable access to programs and services that support their wellbeing and reintegration.

Modified Movement in Medium and Maximum Security Unit

Description: During our visit in October, it was reported to CAEFS that the medium security population had previously been on a modified movement schedule for a period of 3 weeks. During CAEFS visit on October 21st, it was communicated by staff that a modified movement schedule would be reintroduced starting that evening.



Several individuals shared concerns about the exclusion of one house from the modified movement routine. During this movement schedule, certain houses are prohibited from moving around the facility at the same time, with each house given a particular time of day allotted for rec. However, House 7, NIFW's only designated "drug free house", was excluded from this restriction. One person stated that they felt as though management was "pitting us against one another". CAEFS heard management share at the IC meeting "we want to make it so that people want to be like House 7". It was also observed by one individual that there are no people of color housed in House 7, leading this person to feel as if the decision to exclude House 7 was racially motivated. Management stated that this modified movement schedule was a result of information or concerns of at least 1 individual in every house, except House 7. Individuals voiced extreme frustration at having their day-to-day lives affected due to the behaviors of a handful of people and suggested enforcing them individually.

CAEFS heard many details of the adverse effects of modified movement. It was stated that for some, their only opportunity to leave their house is after 7pm, which excludes them from having outdoor access to daylight. Many individuals spoke to the interference of their exercise, explaining that not being able to go to the gym or walk outside has had adverse effects on their mental health. It was voiced to CAEFS that some find these conditions extremely triggering, resurfacing memories from previous experiences of solitary confinement, and negatively affect the mental health of those who benefit from regular and meaningful human contact. Further, individuals voiced concerns about house dynamics, and how often many individuals will make effort to be away from their house as much as possible to avoid conflict with their housemates, however modified movement schedules further exacerbate these strained relationships, often resulting in conflict. The modified movement schedule was described by incarcerated individuals as restrictive, punitive, and a result of overincarceration.

Discussion: Management stated that the use of modified movement routines is to keep everyone safe, and that when an influx of contraband or information is received, these practices are used as a measure for staff to be able to control the situation. Management also shared that some individuals are "happy", as the modified movement routine limits their risk of becoming involved in conflicts within the institution. Management reiterated that during modified movement, work and programming are not interrupted, just leisure time in the evenings. CAFES clarified that the reports of individuals not having access to daylight were from those who did not participate in work or programs.

Law and Policy:

CCRA s. 4 (c): the Service uses the least restrictive measures consistent with the protection of society, staff members and [incarcerated persons];

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] are safe, healthful and free of practices that undermine a person's sense of personal dignity.

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that CSC limit the use of modified movement schedules to only the most necessary and time-limited situations, in alignment with least restrictive measures. Where movement restrictions are unavoidable, efforts should be made to preserve access to daylight, recreation, and meaningful human contact to protect mental health and personal dignity. Recognizing the stated adverse effects these practices can have, particularly on women and gender-diverse individuals, CAEFS encourages the development of alternative, health-



centered approaches that reflect the principles of *Creating Choices* and evidence-based best practices. These approaches should prioritize empowerment, holistic care, and equity-based approaches for those with complex mental health needs.

Lockdown Conditions

Description: CAEFS was unable to complete their scheduled visit on October 22nd, due to lockdown conditions at NIFW. The lockdown lasted a period of 6 days, from October 22nd – October 27th, impeding individuals' access to family, school, work, and programs.

Discussion:

Management stated they felt it was necessary to implement a lockdown under section 53 of the CCRA, which resulted in items being found that were deemed unsafe to people incarcerated at NIFW. Management shared that reports were received of a missing needle, which they responded to by collecting and redistributing all of the PNEP kits while on lockdown. Management reported that during the lockdown individuals still had access to meaningful human contact by way of housemates and PW's, and that canteen and hygiene distribution was not interrupted. Management affirmed it was a difficult week for both staff and incarcerated individuals and was grateful for the cooperation of the incarcerated individuals.

Law and Policy:

CCRA s. 4 (c): the Service uses the least restrictive measures consistent with the protection of society, staff members and [incarcerated persons];

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] are safe, healthful and free of practices that undermine a person's sense of personal dignity.

Recommendation: CAEFS strongly recommends that CSC cease the practice of population-wide lockdowns entirely. These conditions do not conform with the principle of least restrictive measures, produce significant trauma, disrupt access to programs, work, education, and family contact, and have long-term negative impacts on mental health and well-being. Alternative targeted strategies should be developed to address safety concerns without imposing blanket restrictions on the entire population. Upholding the dignity, mental health, and human rights of incarcerated individuals must remain a central priority in all safety and security planning.

Population Update

CAEFS would also like to note that the recorded number of incarcerated people at Nova at the time of the management meeting was 113, with 1 person currently held in the SIU. NIFW also has 1 mother and baby participating in the mother-child program at this time.

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

