



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

Re: November 2025 Advocacy Visit Follow-Up

December 14th, 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 December 8th, 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 November 25th and 27th, 2025. It also includes our summary of the discussion that took place during the meeting mentioned above, relevant laws and policies, and CAEFS' recommendations.

As of November 30th, 2025, FVI's population inclusive of all three security classifications was 102. During CAEFS' November visit, one person was incarcerated in the Structured Intervention Unit.

1. Interregional Transfer to Fraser Valley Institution

Description: Advocates noted an increase in reports of interregional transfers to FVI, particularly from the Ontario region. Several individuals reported being transferred to FVI directly from Ontario provincial jails. Although Grand Valley Institution (GVI) in Kitchener, Ontario, was indicated to the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) as the institution in closest proximity to their families, communities, and release destinations, these individuals were instead penitentiary placed to FVI.

These individuals reported that their family and community supports are based in the Ontario region and that they had requested penitentiary placement at GVI to maintain meaningful connections with these supports throughout their incarceration. They expressed deeply felt concern about how the increased distance from their home communities affects their ability to receive in-person family visits and to stay connected to their loved ones. They also noted that remaining incarcerated in the Pacific region may negatively impact future reintegration opportunities closer to home.

Discussion: IMT shared that they are currently supporting other regions due to increased numbers of federally sentenced women and gender-diverse people. IMT confirmed that personal suitability is considered during penitentiary placement, but it is not always possible. IMT stated that people newly transferred to FVI from different regions can connect with FVI's Visit & Correspondences department to facilitate video visits. IMT also shared that there is currently a paid position at the penitentiary for an incarcerated person to provide intake support to new admissions.

Law/Policy:

Corrections and Conditional Release Act (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 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 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. CAEFS further encourages the CSC to meaningfully consider alternatives to custody in a penitentiary as per section 4(c.1) of the CCRA.

2. Impacts of Searching Practices

Description: Advocates received reports regarding the negative impacts of two search practices at FVI:

- the searching of Indigenous cultural items in the maximum-security unit; and
- the use of the ION scanner on mail received to the penitentiary.

Individuals reported that CSC staff searched their sacred medicine bundles during routine cell searches in the maximum-security unit, without observing appropriate cultural practices or protocols. This search practice was described by those impacted as violating and disrespectful to their Indigenous culture.

Advocates also received increased reports of mail testing positive on the ION scanner for substances such as narcotics. People reported receiving positive ION scanner results for narcotics on postcards and letters sent by family members in the community who have no history of substance use. As a result, individuals described feeling anxious about receiving mail, knowing that a positive result could negatively affect their Correctional Plan progress and impact their access to a lower security classification, despite having no control over who handles their mail before it arrives at FVI.

Several individuals also noted seeing correctional officers use the ION scanner without changing gloves after receiving a positive result, raising concerns about cross-contamination.

Discussion: IMT reported that they were unaware of sacred bundles being searched without proper cultural protocols and emphasized that Elders should be consulted when searches involve cultural items. They encouraged individuals to raise concerns with the Correctional Manager of the Maximum-Security Unit or the unit's designated Elder.



Regarding the ION scanner, IMT noted that it is one of the security tools used at FVI and stated that the thresholds for positive results are reasonable and nuanced. They advised individuals to consult their case management teams or the Security Intelligence Officer if they have questions about positive readings.

Law/Policy:

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

CCRA, section (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 (CD) 566-12 (Personal Property of [Incarcerated People]), section 12: Any required security examination of Indigenous medicine bundles, religious and spiritual articles or other sacred objects will be accomplished by having the owner manipulate them for visual inspection by the examining officer. If the owner is uncooperative or refuses to manipulate the item for visual inspection, the item may be inspected by an Elder, Chaplain, or cultural representative who is not [a federally sentenced person].

CAEFS Recommendations: CAEFS encourages CSC to ensure that all searches involving sacred medicines and cultural items comply fully with CD 566-12, including the requirement that such items be handled by the owner whenever possible. CAEFS further recommends that CSC implement trauma-informed search protocols that uphold dignity and cultural safety, particularly in maximum security units in the Pacific and Prairies regions where the majority of people classified as maximum security are Indigenous and gender-diverse.

3. Access to Substance Use Support

Description: Individuals incarcerated at FVI reported needing access to consistent substance use programming and support throughout their federal sentence.

Individuals reported the ability to access substance use programming in community while on day parole but reported insufficient opportunities made available to them by the penitentiary during their incarceration.

Individuals reported inconsistent access to a substance use counsellor at FVI and that programs using a harm reduction approach to substance use are non-existent.

Advocates and people incarcerated at FVI discussed the benefits of a harm-reduction approach to substance use, and how this approach is championed by many community experts. Access to harm reduction substance use programming in community would allow incarcerated people to build positive community networks to support their transition into community post-incarceration.

Individuals also reported the need for increased access to conditional release opportunities for substance use programming such as Unescorted Temporary Absences.

Discussion: Advocates requested a list of the substance use supports available at FVI. IMT also said that Unescorted Temporary Absences are used by the penitentiary to increase access to substance use treatment prior to day parole eligibility.



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 persons] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community.

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 86(1): 86 (1) The Service shall provide every [incarcerated person] with (a) essential health care; and (b) reasonable access to non-essential health care.

CAEFS Recommendations: Given CSC's unique responsibility to provide safe and humane custody for individuals in federal penitentiaries— where incarcerated people rely on staff and contractors for health services, referrals, and emergency care— CSC must consider additional measures to ensure access to essential healthcare is consistent, equitable, and aligned with community best practices. CAEFS encourages both FVI and the CSC to expand access to harm-reduction and substance-use programs and services to support its dual mandate of the rehabilitation and reintegration of incarcerated people.

4. Representation of Maximum-Security Population in Peer-led Committees and Penitentiary Environment

Description: Advocates continue to receive reports from individuals in the maximum-security unit who feel isolated and disconnected from contributing to the penitentiary environment and providing feedback on penitentiary operations and decision-making.

The maximum-security population at FVI has also repeatedly identified the need for paid employment positions specific to the maximum-security unit, both to support skills development and to ensure their perspectives are represented in penitentiary consultations and decision-making. Individuals in maximum security expressed a desire for more concrete representation, including paid pod representatives or a designated Inmate Wellness Committee (IWC) representative for the maximum-security unit, similar to the representation available in minimum security.

The Inmate Wellness Committee (IWC) reported ongoing efforts to engage with the maximum-security population but noted that this group remains underrepresented in penitentiary consultations despite these efforts. IWC and advocates discussed the development of employment and representative roles tailored to maximum security, which could strengthen connections to the broader institutional environment and support continuity of employment upon transfer to lower security classifications.

CAEFS Peer Advocates reported challenges accessing individuals in maximum security, despite ongoing advocacy relationships and the need for regular check-ins. The creation of a Peer Advocate position within the maximum-security unit was identified as an opportunity to improve access to advocacy and support.

Discussion: IMT stated that they are working closely with the IWC on employment opportunities for individuals in the maximum-security unit. IMT also said for Peer Advocates to contact the Assistant Warden of Interventions or Operations if they continue to experience issues with access to the maximum-security population.

Law/Policy:



CCRA, 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 73: [Incarcerated people] are entitled to reasonable opportunities to assemble peacefully and associate with other inmates within the penitentiary, subject to such reasonable limits as are prescribed for protecting the security of the penitentiary or the safety of persons.

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 IWC 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, especially those in maximum security who experience the penitentiary's most restrictive conditions.

5. Access to Elder Supports

Description: Individuals in minimum and medium security reported having no designated Elder and indicated that requesting access to Elder support through Indigenous Liaison Officers (ILOs) is often slow and rarely results in timely Elder engagement. Individuals in maximum security reported having a designated Elder for the unit; however, due to competing institutional demands, the Elder is frequently required to leave the unit to provide support elsewhere.

Individuals noted that there is currently no Elder designated for the Pathways Program, an Elder-driven CSC healing initiative based on the Indigenous Medicine Wheel, available to individuals in medium security at FVI.

Discussion: IMT acknowledged the reported concerns regarding access to Elder supports at FVI. IMT advised that efforts to increase Elder supports are underway at Regional Headquarters and requested that CAEFS advocates continue to encourage individuals to submit requests for cultural supports through the ILOs.

Law/Policy:

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 83(2): The Service shall take all reasonable steps to make available to Indigenous inmates the services of an Indigenous spiritual leader or elder after consultation with (a) the national Indigenous advisory committee established under section 82; and (b) the appropriate regional and local Indigenous advisory committees.

CD 702 (Indigenous [Incarcerated People]), section 6(b): The Institutional Head will ensure [incarcerated people] are provided with the services of an Elder/Spiritual Advisor, in consultation with the Regional Administrator, Indigenous Initiatives.



CD 700 (Correctional Interventions): The Institutional Head will ensure correctional policies, assessments, respect, programs and practices and are responsive to: 1. gender, including the special needs of women 2. ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences, including Indigenous [people who are incarcerated] 3. [incarcerated persons] requiring mental health care and those with physical disabilities

CAEFS Recommendations: Over 50% of people incarcerated in federal prisons designated for women are Indigenous, and meeting the needs of Indigenous people in custody must be a priority. It is CAEFS' view that the CSC should, in the spirit of addressing this national human rights crisis and upholding the principles of Creating Choices, prioritize the decarceration of Indigenous people in Canada, especially women and gender diverse people.

6. Impacts of Incarceration on Financial Stability and Agency

Description: Advocates continue to receive reports that wages earned through CSC employment create significant barriers to meaningful preparation for community reintegration, particularly as canteen prices and third-party purchase costs continue to rise, making it effectively impossible for individuals to save funds during incarceration.

Individuals reported that Level A pay, the highest wage available to federally incarcerated individuals and currently set at \$6.90 per day, is inconsistent with community standards and undermines financial stability and personal agency during incarceration. As outlined in Annex B of Commissioner's Directive 730, access to Level A pay requires an individual to demonstrate a "high level of accountability," a criterion that individuals report effectively excludes those who maintain their innocence.

People incarcerated at FVI reported ongoing challenges in understanding penitentiary financial statements, along with limited opportunities and resources to build financial literacy skills. Additional concerns were raised regarding hygiene allowances, with individuals reporting that the bi-weekly allocation of approximately \$7 is insufficient to meet basic needs.

Following recent interregional transfers to FVI, newly admitted individuals reported being provided with a \$15 penitentiary loan to call family and supports and purchase essential canteen items upon arrival. Individuals reported that the full amount is deducted from their subsequent pay, resulting in financial hardship in the following weeks and significantly limiting their ability to maintain family contact and access basic canteen items. The suggestion was made to repay the loan incrementally over two or more pay cycles, so that access to family and supports remains consistent within the first months of arrival to the penitentiary.

Discussion: IMT noted that individuals are not required to spend the full \$15 in funds loaned by the penitentiary, and that these financial procedures are standard and non-negotiable. IMT added that the IWC may request further information regarding these rules from FVI's finance department.

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.

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
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