



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

December 5th 2025

Re: CAEFS Regional Advocacy Visit, November 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 November 18-19 2025. This letter also includes a summary of the discussion that took place during the meeting on November 27th, 2025, relevant laws and policies, and CAEFS' positions. Thank you, and we look forward to your response.

Access to Conditional Release

Description: CAEFS continues to hear from individuals who report facing barriers in accessing conditional release. Several people have been asked to delay their parole or have had the support of their Institutional Parole Officer (IPO) rescinded.

Discussion: CAEFS asked management if the increase in population at NIFW is impacting the capacity of the IPO's, and whether this is having an impact on access to conditional release. Management responded that there are enough skilled IPO's who are ensuring effective case management to promote release. NIFW provided further context, adding that in some cases recommendations to delay parole are made by the Case Management Team (CMT), not solely by the IPO. Management reiterated that it is an individual's right to apply to the Parole Board of Canada (PBC), however support from the IPO and CMT is dependent on many factors, including institutional behavior.

Law and Policy:

CCRA s. 3(b)

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. 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 persons] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens



CD s. 700 (5)

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 that NIFW improve access to conditional release by supporting individuals' right to apply for parole without delay, in every possible circumstance. This includes maintaining adequate case management capacity and ensuring decisions by IPOs and CMTs promote equitable and timely pathways to release at the earliest opportunity.

Staff Communications with Incarcerated Persons

Description: CAEFS heard from individuals who shared concerns about recent communication with staff at NIFW. One individual reported that strong profanity was used while she was being instructed to move living units. Another reported that when asking an officer in V&C about contact with her lawyer, staff insisted this wasn't possible and that this person's lawyer must be lying to her. Throughout the visit with her family, this individual felt the same officer was being very confrontational and stated she was going to be making a complaint, to which the staff member responded by issuing an institutional charge for aggressive behavior.

Discussion: Management advised that they would investigate this further and meet with individuals to discuss mediation. Management stated that staff are not permitted to use aggressive or profane language.

Law and Policy:

CCRA s. 4

(d) [incarcerated individuals] retain the rights of all members of society except those that are, as a consequence of the sentence, lawfully and necessarily removed or restricted;

(f) correctional decisions are made in a forthright and fair manner, with access by the offender to an effective grievance procedure;

Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of [incarcerated persons] (Nelson Mandela Rules)

Rule 1: All [incarcerated persons] shall be treated with the respect due to their inherent dignity and value as human beings. No [incarcerated person] shall be subjected to, and all [incarcerated persons] shall be protected from, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, for which no circumstances whatsoever may be invoked as a justification. The safety and security of [incarcerated persons], staff, service providers and visitors shall be ensured at all times.

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that NIFW management reinforces expectations for respectful, non-aggressive communication, ensuring all incarcerated individuals are treated with fairness and dignity. As public sector staff, CSC employees are bound by many responsibilities to treat others with dignity and respect.

Private Family Visitation (PFV) Unit



Description: In early November CAEFS heard from NIFW Management that the PFV unit had been made temporarily unavailable as the space was being used for additional living units. While attending the Inmate Committee (IC) meeting on November 18th, it was shared that the PFV is reopened for intended use.

Discussion: CAEFS asked for confirmation that the PFV still remains available for family visits. Management confirmed, indicating that the PFV unit is back “online” due to the reduction in population. Management advised that the family visit that was cancelled, due to the closure, has since taken place. Management stated that the PFV unit may need to be used as a living unit again in the future; however, this is not preferred by management.

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. 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 encourages NIFW to maintain consistent, uninterrupted access to the Private Family Visitation unit, and make a committed effort to explore alternative measures to provide access to family and find living arrangements for federally incarcerated women and gender diverse people when the penitentiaries are overcrowded.

Access to Family Liaison (FLO) Officer

Description: CAEFS received reports that individuals do not feel they have adequate access to the FLO. Some have been waiting more than 2 weeks for an appointment, after submitting multiple requests in some cases. Individuals vocalized the emotional pain and anxiety they felt being limited in accessing their family, especially with close proximity to the holidays.

Discussion: Management stated that this is the first time they have heard concerns regarding the FLO and will follow up.

Law and Policy:

CCRA s. 4 (b)

(b) the Service enhances its effectiveness and openness through the timely exchange of relevant information with victims, [incarcerated persons] and other components of the criminal justice system and through communication about its correctional policies and programs to victims, [incarcerated persons] and the public;

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 improving timely access to the FLO, to ensure that individuals can maintain consistent contact with their families. Establishing clearer response times and ensuring adequate coverage during periods of higher demand would better support family connection and reduce the emotional impacts caused by delays in access.

V&C Delays – Access to Family and Healthcare

Description: Several individuals also reported extreme delays in V&C processing, particularly surrounding the approval of phone numbers and video visits. One individual reported submitting an application for video visits 2 months ago, which still has not been approved. Affected individuals also include the 7 women who were involuntarily pen-placed from Ontario and have not had access to their family in over one week. One young mother, who has never experienced incarceration before, expressed emotional pain while explaining the anxiety she has not being able to communicate with her children, who aren't yet aware that she has been transferred to the Atlantic Region. These delays also interfere with incarcerated individuals' ability to receive funds, and belongings, which are confined to the time frame set out by CSC upon arrival.

CAEFS also continues to receive reports of institutional mail delays, particularly with the delivery of appointment slips. Individuals report receiving their appointment slip for service sometimes up to 5 days after the appointment has passed.

Discussion: Management committed to looking into the status of PIN's for the 7 individuals who were involuntarily transferred and has approved 60-day extensions for the receipt of their belongings. Upon review, Management discovered a backlog of PIN entries and voicemails which had not been responded to. Management committed additional staff to resolve this issue in their update to CAEFS via email on November 27th.

Law and Policy:

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.

CCRA s. 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 the least restrictive environment for that person, taking into account

(b) accessibility to

(i) the person's home community and family,

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.



Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that the institution ensures timely processing of all V&C requests and maintains adequate staffing to prevent disruptions in access to family and healthcare, as access to family and healthcare are critical, non essential provisions that the CSC is responsible for facilitating. An absence of either produces adverse outcomes for federally sentenced individuals.

Healthcare – Dental Appointments Cancelled

Description: CAEFS learned that one day of scheduled dental appointments in November were cancelled.

Discussion: CAEFS asks for an update on the contractual obligations of the dental provider. Management commented that the clinic cancellation was a make-up day for previous cancellations. Management stated that all allotted hours within the dental contract will be used before the end of the year.

Law and Policy:

CCRA 86(1)

The Service shall provide every [incarcerated person] with

(a) essential health care; and

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

CD 800

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

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that NIFW continue to closely monitor the dental provider's performance to ensure contractual obligations are met and service interruptions are minimized whenever possible.

Privacy Concerns

Description: CAEFS learned that multiple documents containing confidential information about incarcerated individuals were found on the floor by another person at NIFW, presumably dropped by a staff member. These documents contained details of an individual's institutional charge, as well as a copy of another person's complaint response.

Discussion: CAEFS asked management if they were aware of this, and whether individuals will be notified that their privacy was breached. Management was not aware of this issue and asked for the documents to be returned to NIFW.

Law and Policy:

Privacy Act s. 7

Personal information under the control of a government institution shall not, without the consent of the individual to whom it relates, be used by the institution except

(a) for the purpose for which the information was obtained or compiled by the institution or for a use consistent with that purpose; or

(b) for a purpose for which the information may be disclosed to the institution under subsection 8(2).



CD 701 s. 30

No personal information will be released to anyone other than the individual it relates to, unless one of the following conditions applies:

- a. the information is already public
- b. the individual concerned consents to release of the information, or
- c. there exists a legal authority to disclose.

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that NIFW reinforce procedures for handling confidential information and ensure staff are aware of their obligations under privacy policies. Measures should include secure storage, careful document handling, and prompt notification to individuals if their personal information has been breached.

Use of Body Scan Machine in Secure Unit

Description: CAEFS learned that during the lockdown, all individuals in Pod A of the maximum-security unit were required to complete a body scan. CAEFS asked for information regarding the policy and procedure for these machines, as well as who reviews the scans.

CAEFS heard from one woman who had completed a body scan and was accused of having a package inside of her body. She was scanned a second time and then quarantined in the shower in the SIU for 2 hours. During this time, a male officer was examining a zoomed in picture on his cell phone, pointing to her labia and stating he believed this image was a condom containing contraband. During this time the individual was repeatedly told she would be involuntarily transferred out of the province. Following this, she completed a third body scan and then returned to her cell without further acknowledgement.

Discussion: Management provided information that body scanner machines have been introduced at 2 federal prisons designated for women, including NIFW, and provides technology as a non-intrusive search method, often used as an alternative or precursor to a strip search.

Regarding the specific individual's experience, Management clarified that the shower is used as a private area to temporarily isolate an individual between scans. Regarding comments about involuntary transfer, that tone and perception could have influenced the discussion; however, involuntary transfer would have been the outcome in cases such as this, where the SIU and maximum-security units are at capacity.

Law and Policy:

CCRF s. 8

Everyone has the right to be secure against unreasonable search or seizure.

CD 566-7 s. 27

The trained operator will:

- a. be of the same gender as the offender, or in compliance with the offender's gender-related needs as reflected in their individualized protocol
- c. the images produced by the body scanner is of a quality that permits the trained operator to review and analyze them for the presence of contraband



Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that NIFW abide by the procedural guidelines surrounding the use of body scan machines to ensure use fully respects the dignity, privacy, and rights of individuals. This includes ensuring scans are conducted by appropriately trained staff of the same gender, maintaining strict confidentiality of images, and providing clear communication to individuals about the process and any outcomes.

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 122, with 1 person currently held in the SIU under CD 843.

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

