



To: Angela Beecher, Warden
Grand Valley Institution for Women
1575 Homer Watson Blvd, Kitchener, ON, N2P 2C5

December 5th, 2025

CAEFS' October 2025 Advocacy Letter

Dear Angela,

We want to thank members of the institutional management team (IMT) at GVI for taking the time to meet with our advocacy team on November 14th via Teams.

This letter summarizes reports we received and conditions we observed during our visit to the Grand Valley Institution on October 28th-30th as well as summaries of the discussion between the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) and members of the institutional management team following the visit, the relevant laws and policies, and CAEFS' recommendations.

We look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

Tise Ogunleye
Lead Advocate



Reports of harmful immediate institutional response to man breaking into the penitentiary

Description: CAEFS received reports that on November 2nd, 2025, there was an incident in which an unknown male jumped the fence between the minimum security unit (MSU) and the medium security area, and entered the institution to attack incarcerated women and gender diverse people. He was reportedly inside for the prison grounds for several minutes, and when people attempted to call for help, they were not believed. People reported that the first response by security staff was to assume that the women were involved in the incident, and that it was an elaborate attempt to introduce contraband.

The man assaulted two women, and they were forced to defend themselves until staff arrived. People shared that they felt their concerns and fears were dismissed, and they felt they did not get adequate support in the immediate aftermath, reports which significantly diverge from institutional accounts. Individuals reported that immediately following the man's capture, they were ordered to bed without support.

Discussion: The institutional management team (IMT) shared that mental health went to all units the next day following the incident, and the Indigenous team offered support to all units as well as a smudging session. The IMT expressed concern about preventing similar incidents and indicated they are considering more restrictive measures, including higher fencing.

Law & Policy:

CCRA s. 4 (c): The Service uses the least restrictive measures consistent with the protection of society, staff members and people in prison

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] 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. 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: In order for the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) to ensure it is using the least restrictive measures consistent with the protection of society, staff members, and [people in prison], CAEFS encourages CSC to develop alternative measures to respond to issues of institutional safety. The CSC should recognize that imposing excessive disciplinary measures for matters outside an individual's control can have harmful and unjust impacts on people in prison.

Reports of lockdowns and limited access to legal and peer supports following break in

Description: CAEFS received reports of various lockdowns since the day of the above-described incident that consequential to this event, people experienced limited access to phones and to calling the CAEFS line, as well as their ability to speak with lawyers. CAEFS also received reports that a peer advocate was prevented from attending a meeting called by SIO for house 14. People in house 14 shared that they were feeling scared and not properly supported by the staff.



Discussion: The IMT shared that there have been no lockdowns since November 2nd, the day of the incident. The IMT shared that since then, they have had periods of restricted movement through each security unit, which they state is not the same as a lockdown. The IMT staff shared that they have not prevented house 14 from calling the CAEFS lines, using the phones in general, or speaking with a lawyer.

Law & Policy:

CCRA s. 4 (c): The Service uses the least restrictive measures consistent with the protection of society, staff members and people in prison

CCRA s. 3: The purpose of the federal correctional system is to contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by (a) carrying out sentences imposed by courts through the safe and humane custody and supervision of [federally sentenced people]; and (b) assisting the rehabilitation of [federally sentenced people] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community

CCRR s. 83 (2): The Service shall take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of every [incarcerated person] and that every [incarcerated person] is (d) given the opportunity to exercise for at least one hour every day outdoors, weather permitting, or indoors where the weather does not permit exercising outdoors.

CAEFS' Recommendations: Lockdowns produce significant trauma and result in long-term adverse impacts to individuals subjected to them. CAEFS encourages CSC to develop rights and dignity supporting respond to issues of institutional safety, such as increased dynamic security, and decarceration of the population. In relation to the use of language, although the CSC may have different technical classifications for lockdown like measures, these are experienced the same way, and produce the same adverse effects on incarcerated women and gender diverse people. CAEFS encourages the CSC to understand restricted movement as a significant deprivation of free movement, liberty, and a dignity preserving environment, and to resist institutional trends to increasingly restrict people's movement as a population management strategy.

Reports of issues and delays with institutional timeframes

Description: CAEFS received several reports regarding challenges with various institutional timeframes. People shared concerns about significant delays in receiving responses to complaints and noted that parole officers were not completing required paperwork in a timely manner. These delays were reported to have potential impacts on parole hearings and on the timely resolution of individual issues.

CAEFS also received reports that staff were taking more than two days to notify individuals of new disciplinary charges, which caused frustration and uncertainty, as people were left unsure whether they had been charged for an incident. In addition, concerns were raised about inconsistencies in the Visits and Correspondence (V&C) policy. While the policy states that money orders and bank drafts must be submitted with photo ID only once, some individuals reported being told that ID must be provided each time. This inconsistency creates confusion, particularly for newcomers who are still learning institutional rules.



Discussion: The institutional management team (IMT) shared that the institutional population has increased significantly, which may be contributing to the delays in responding to complaints. They also explained that parole officers currently lack adequate workspace and are managing large caseloads due to the increased population, which may explain the slower completion of paperwork. The IMT stated that they will investigate this further and explore options to mitigate the issue. Regarding delays in charge notifications, the IMT clarified that charges are first reviewed by the Assistant Warden of Operations (AWO), who classifies the charge. Once classified, staff have two working days to notify the individual. In relation to the V&C policy, the IMT confirmed that photo ID is required only once and should be coordinated through the parole officer; after this initial submission, ID is not required again.

Law & Policy:

CD 700 s.10(5): The Parole Officer will facilitate the [incarcerated person's] reintegration into the community at the earliest possible time while ensuring public and staff safety in all case management decisions

CCRA 4 (f): correctional decisions are made in a forthright and fair manner, with access by the [federally sentenced person] to an effective grievance procedure;

CCRA s. 3: The purpose of the federal correctional system is to contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by (a) carrying out sentences imposed by courts through the safe and humane custody and supervision of [federally sentenced people]; and (b) assisting the rehabilitation of [federally sentenced people] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community

CAEFS' Recommendations: CAEFS appreciates GVI's commitment to further investigation and mitigation options for this issue. When conditional release processes are delayed, and when institutional timeframes generally are unclear or unmet, it may contravene the Service's obligations to provide timely, transparent, and fair decision-making and cause people to experience barriers to timely reintegration.

Reports related to physical conditions of confinement

Description: CAEFS received reports of a water shutdown in the minimum-security unit that lasted for several hours. People shared that they were not given advance notice of the shutdown and were therefore unprepared. People shared that this caused significant distress, as washrooms became unusable and individuals had to restrict their activities during this period.

Discussion: Institutional management stated that they do not recall this specific incident but noted that it was likely an emergency shutdown, in which case, they are unable to provide advance notice. They clarified that for any planned shutdown, a memo would be issued to notify people in advance, and water would be provided. However, during an emergency shutdown, they are not able to implement these measures.



Law & Policy:

CCRA s.70: The Service shall take all reasonable steps 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

CCRR s.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: People in prison maintain their constitutional right to live in a safe environment and to be free from physical, mental, and emotional impacts. CAEFS encourages GVI and the CSC broadly to address and be responsive to the individual impacts produced by physical conditions of confinement. Adverse impacts of incarceration are not undocumented or speculative; they are recognized throughout Canadian and international laws and protocols. It is the CSC's responsibility, in carrying out federal sentences in Canada, to be attentive to these impacts and to take steps to minimize them, in order to carry out the mandate of Canada's federal prison system.

Reports related to searches

Description: CAEFS received reports of a search conducted in the maximum-security unit. People shared that they were not permitted to change out of their sleepwear before leaving their rooms and that their property was taken away or taken apart during the search. Individuals reported feeling frustrated, as some of their belongings were taken or damaged in the process.

Discussion: Institutional management stated that the search took place early in the morning, during which individuals were woken up and instructed to leave their cells immediately. They shared that everyone was adequately dressed in pajamas but was not permitted to change into other clothing before exiting. The IMT added that if individuals have concerns about damaged or destroyed property, they may submit a claim against the Crown.

Law & Policy:

CCRA s. 4 (c): The Service uses the least restrictive measures consistent with the protection of society, staff members and people in prison

CCRR s. 84: The institutional head shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that the effects of an inmate that are permitted to be taken into and kept in the penitentiary are protected from loss or damage.

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] and the working conditions of staff members are safe, healthful and free of practices that undermine a person's sense of personal dignity

CAEFS' Recommendations: CAEFS urges CSC to safeguard the dignity of individuals and prevent property damage during searches, as respectful procedures will subsequently foster trust, support institutional stability, and reduce conflicts between staff and people in prison.



Access to an empowering and dignity-preserving environment

Description: CAEFS received reports of clothes being easily worn out and taking a while to get replaced by the institution. CAEFS also received reports that the Stock Item Supply (SIS) that they are providing used clothing, including clothing that has large stains or holes, for which people share they are getting trouble for. People shared that this feels unfair, and any stains and holes in clothing are out of their control.

Discussion: The institutional management team (IMT) shared that their policy is to reuse and recycle clothing, and they make sure that clothing is inspected and cleaned before being used. They shared that items that involve direct skin contact are not being recycled. The IMT shared that they have also adopted a new process, that when a newcomer comes in, they receive a bag of clothes and a bag of hygiene, and a staff member will review the contents of the bags to address any issues. They shared that people are only in trouble if they caused damage that is not wear and tear.

Law & Policy:

CCRA s. 4 (c): The Service uses the least restrictive measures consistent with the protection of society, staff members and people in prison

CCRA 41 (1): Where a staff member believes on reasonable grounds that an [inmate] has committed or is committing a disciplinary offence, the staff member shall take all reasonable steps to resolve the matter informally, where possible.

CCRR s. 83 (2): The Service shall take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of every [incarcerated person] and that every [incarcerated person] is (a) **adequately clothed and fed**;

CAEFS' Recommendations: CAEFS encourages that GVI continue working with staff and inmates to resolve issues surrounding clothing, to avoid any punitive outcomes and to uphold the dignity, comfort, and wellbeing of incarcerated individuals by ensuring that all clothing provided meets basic standards of cleanliness, quality, and appropriateness.

Reports of discrimination based on sexual orientation and consequences for using the Grievance system

Description: CAEFS received reports that couples feel discriminated against due to their sexual orientation. One couple shared that they were yelled at by staff and told that if they were to file a grievance, they would get a charge. The couple shared that this made them feel victimized and feel they had been treated very unfairly by the staff.

Discussion: The institutional management team shared that on the occasions that staff yelled at them, they were being inappropriate. The IMT shared that staff are expected to speak up in those situations, as inappropriate behaviour is not allowed within the institution. The IMT also shared that grievances are encouraged, and they do not shy away from them, but in the event that an issue can be resolved through a conversation, they also encourage that.



Law & Policy:

CCRA s. 91: Every [incarcerated person] shall have complete access to the [internal] grievance procedure without negative consequences.

Prohibited grounds of discrimination under section 3(1) of the Canadian Human Rights Act “are race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics, disability and conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted or in respect of which a record suspension has been ordered”

As a result of a 2019 case before the Canadian Human Rights Commission, the CSC communicated memos to all incarcerated populations that “the Correctional Service of Canada has no tolerance for discrimination with respect to inmate accommodation. Requests for house/cell moves will not be declined based on sexual orientation or relationship status. All requests will be considered based on the provisions outlined in Commissioner’s Directive 550 – Inmate Accommodations”

CAEFS’ Recommendations: CAEFS is committed to fostering legal literacy within penitentiaries and encourages GVI to work collaboratively with us to ensure that access to the grievance system is supported, accessible, and free from barriers. Sexual orientation and relationship status are protected grounds in the Canadian human rights act, and discrimination must not occur either directly or through adverse differential impact

