

"The system made many of us feel like we were less than human, like throwaways. Issues around safety, sanitation, mental health, and even basic human rights were often overlooked or ignored. In that space, CAEFS stood out as a rare, consistent source of support. They showed up when it felt like no one else would."

- FORMER PEER ADVOCATE AND CURRENT VOLUNTEER REGIONAL ADVOCATE

IN THE 2024/2025 YEAR,  
CAEFS MADE NEARLY

**50**

ADVOCACY VISITS TO  
WOMENS' PRISONS

# Advocacy Visits to Federal Penitentiaries Designated for Women

---

## **“ON AVERAGE, OUR TEAMS NOW SPEND OVER 70 HOURS PER MONTH INSIDE FEDERAL PRISONS”**

In the 2024–2025 fiscal year, CAEFS conducted nearly 50 advocacy visits to federal prisons designated for women — an increase from the previous year.

During these visits, advocacy teams meet with individuals, peer-led committees, and living unit representatives (where applicable). Together, they identify and address issues related to conditions of confinement and other systemic concerns. These issues are then raised with the Institutional Management Team.

CAEFS Regional Advocacy Teams make monthly visits to the Nova Institution, Grand Valley Institution, Edmonton Institution for Women, and Fraser Valley Institution. We continue to support other penitentiaries and regional psychiatric centres remotely and in collaboration with local partners, including local Elizabeth Fry Societies.

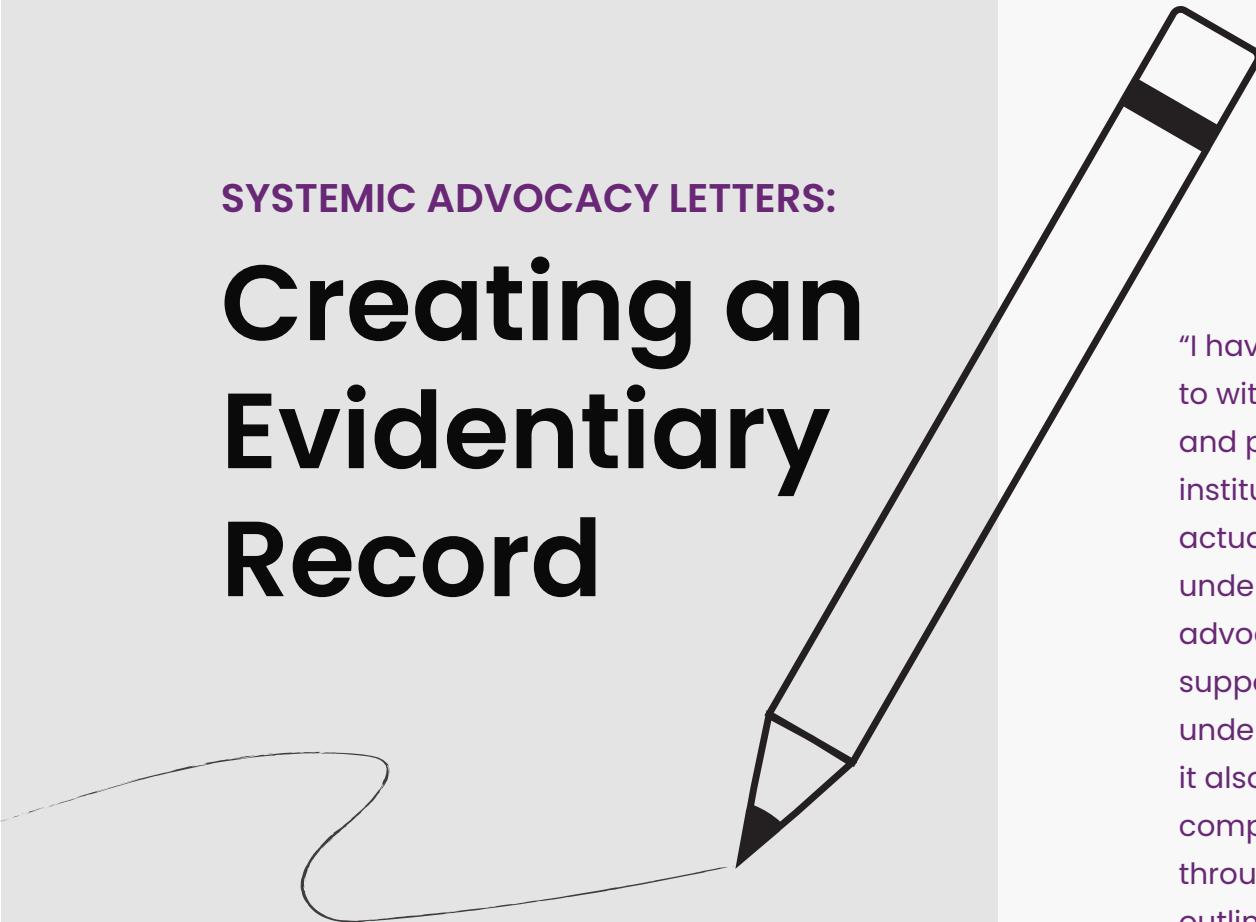
The length of our visits has also increased. On average, our teams now spend over 70 hours per month inside federal prisons, providing direct advocacy support, access to justice education, and monitoring conditions. This does not include the hours spent weekly by volunteers and CAEFS staff responding to calls from incarcerated individuals, or the ongoing support provided by Peer Advocates inside the institutions.

“CAEFS’ works from an empowerment model grounded in legal literacy, rights education, and accountability. The Ontario team supports individuals in custody to understand policy, assert their rights, and challenge institutional injustice. With their guidance, my partner has successfully drafted grievances and navigated federal correctional policy in ways that protect his human rights and support his efforts to hold the system accountable [...] equipping him to advocate for himself in ways that would not have been possible without this support. This work meaningfully shifts power back to those most directly impacted by incarceration.”

**- SPOUSE OF INDIVIDUAL INCARCERATED AT THE GRAND VALLEY INSTITUTION**

SYSTEMIC ADVOCACY LETTERS:

# Creating an Evidentiary Record

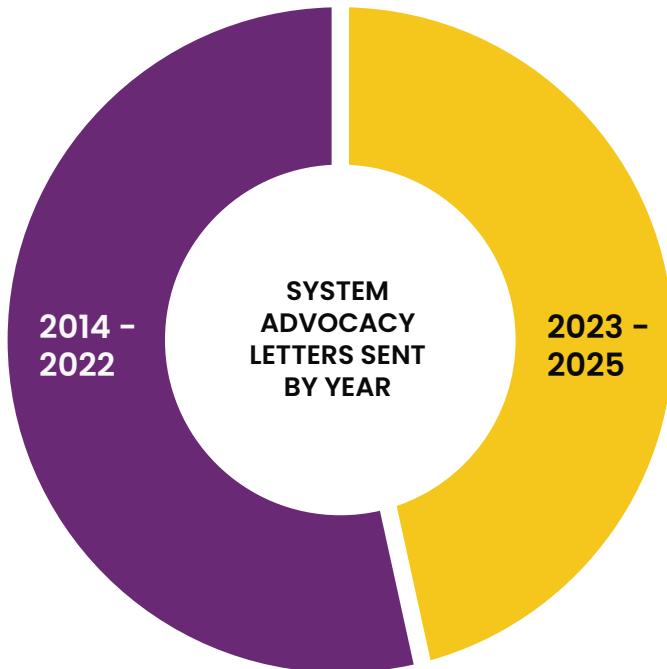


Following each visit, Regional Advocacy Teams produce a systemic advocacy letter that documents the issues reported to CAEFS, discussions with prison management, relevant legal and policy frameworks, and CAEFS' recommendations.

These letters provide an evidentiary record of conditions in federal prisons designated for women and offer policymakers and oversight bodies a real-time view into persistent systemic concerns. They also inform CAEFS' systemic advocacy efforts and strategic direction.

"I have often been surprised and disappointed to witness the disconnect between the legal and policy framework governing federal institutions designated for women and what actually happens within them. This disconnect underlies for me why CAEFS' approach to advocacy is so important. Not only does CAEFS support federally-incarcerated people to better understand and utilize existing frameworks, but it also urges those working within the system to comply with them. This approach is highlighted through CAEFS' advocacy letters, which outline systemic issues that CAEFS raises with management within the institutions: CAEFS ties all of its recommendations to management with specific aspects of the legal policy framework. As a lawyer, I believe this approach is both logical and effective."

— VOLUNTEER REGIONAL ADVOCATE, ONTARIO



This growth demonstrates how dedicated funding and staffing enable consistent documentation — a foundation for more effective and informed legislative change, legal advocacy, human rights complaints, and constitutional challenges.

Beginning in December 2024, CAEFS also began publishing these letters on our website. Their impact has already been felt: for example, defense counsel have used them to inform sentencing hearings.

**Between 2014 and 2024, CAEFS produced 148 systemic advocacy letters. In the last two fiscal years alone — following the introduction of dedicated Lead Advocates — we produced 65 letters, representing nearly 45% of the total letters written in the previous decade.**

You can read an overview of these advocacy letters in the “Summary of Commonly Reported Issues (2024–2025)” section of this report.

**VIEW THE LETTERS AT CAEFS.CA**



# Peer Advocates & Trainings

In 2024–2025, CAEFS delivered Peer Advocacy Trainings at five federal institutions: Joliette Institution, Fraser Valley Institution, Edmonton Institution for Women, Grand Valley Institution, and Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge.

These multi-day trainings help participants understand the legislative framework governing federal prisons, how to use the grievance and complaint processes effectively, how to build and sustain peer-led committees, and other key advocacy skills.

This training is a prerequisite for becoming a Peer Advocate – a paid, institutionally recognized position filled by incarcerated individuals who work alongside CAEFS' Regional Advocacy Teams.

**More than 180 federally incarcerated individuals participated in peer advocacy trainings this past year – over 25% of the population in women's institutions.**

**"I feel you women ran a super indepth course and it was inclusive and I want to thank you. I've come away with a lot more knowledge with which to be able to stand up for my rights and those of the women housed here."**

— PEER ADVOCACY TRAINING PARTICIPANT

In addition to Peer Advocacy trainings, regional advocacy teams also organized other workshops and training sessions throughout the year for both peer advocates and other interested individuals, where they shared resources to support people in their self-advocacy.

This year, this included the launch of CAEFS "Community in Action" – a handbook for federally sentenced women and gender-diverse people to navigate release from prison and being on parole.



***community in action***  
*navigating prison release and parole*

# Volunteers & Students:

## BUILDING COMMUNITY-BASED CAPACITY

In 2024–2025, 18 new volunteers joined our Regional Advocacy Teams, while retaining almost all volunteers from the previous year.

Our volunteers reflect a wide range of experience and backgrounds, including former Peer Advocates and people with lived experience of incarceration, retired civil servants, lawyers, students, professors, researchers, healthcare professionals, local Elizabeth Fry employees and leaders, and people working across the nonprofit sector.

**We got 18 new  
volunteers in 24/25!**



# VOLUNTEERS AND STUDENTS

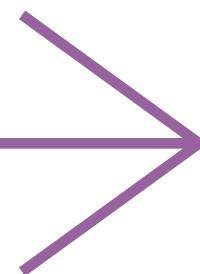


“Volunteering with CAEFS gives me the opportunity to help bridge the gap between incarcerated folks and community, I provide support/resources giving individuals a sense of connection and belonging, I am an advocate for present/former incarcerated persons providing critical education and perspectives that will help change the system for the better.”

— VOLUNTEER REGIONAL ADVOCATE

This year, CAEFS also hosted **twelve Pro Bono Law Students** (six per academic year) from Thompson Rivers University and four practicum students from various fields including Indigenous social work and criminology. Many students begin as volunteers or remain part of the advocacy teams after their placements — and we've been pleased to employ several former students as staff.

# Summary of Commonly Reported Issues



Based on a review of **35 systemic advocacy letters** from Grand Valley Institution, Edmonton Institution for Women, Fraser Valley Institution, and Nova Institution for Women. The following categories reflect the most commonly reported concerns documented across these institutions.

They are listed in order of frequency of reports.

**Access to Conditional Release and Programming**

**Health Care**

**Conditions in the Maximum-Security Units and Structured Intervention Units**

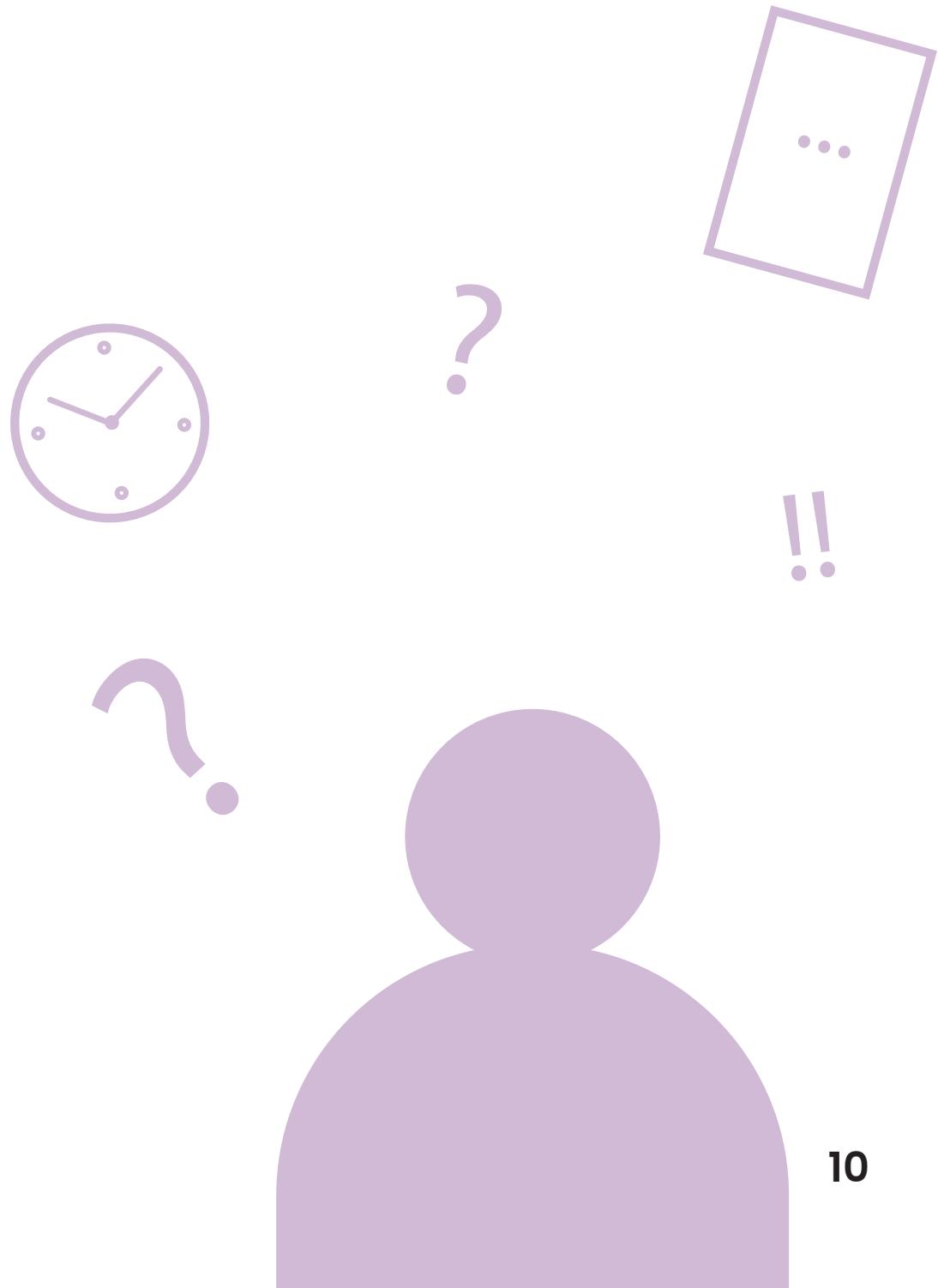
**Access to the Grievance System and Procedural Fairness**

**Security Reviews and Classification**

COMMONLY REPORTED ISSUES:

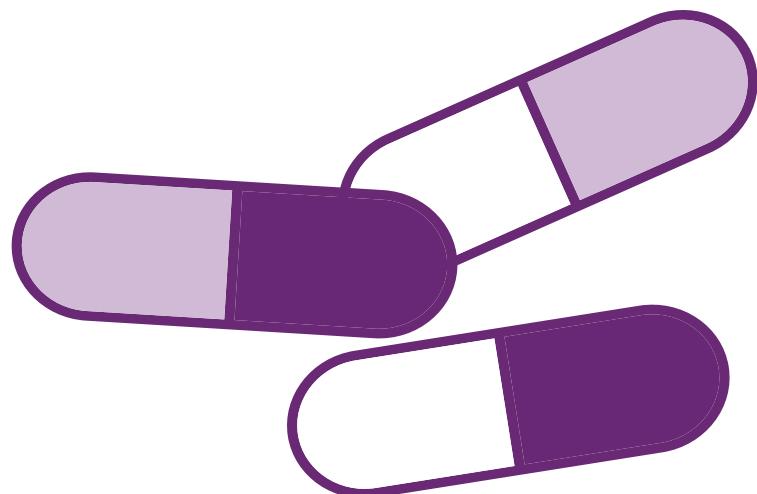
## ACCESS TO CONDITIONAL RELEASE AND PROGRAMMING

- » **Delays in accessing core Correctional Programs** required by individuals' Correctional Plans, often reported to impact parole support and security reviews.
- » **Long program waitlists and frequent cancellations**, often attributed to staff shortages or vacant facilitator positions.
- » **Limited access to employment** and vocational opportunities, reported to undermine preparation for release.
- » **Barriers to section 84 release planning for Indigenous individuals**, including limited institutional support and access to Elders or Indigenous Liaison Officers.
- » **Lack of timely or accurate information from Parole Officers** regarding parole hearings, assessments, and release processes.
- » **Reported confusion or lack of awareness** about how to initiate parole, escorted temporary absences, or other forms of conditional release.
- » **Delays or refusals in parole support** from case management teams, sometimes without clear explanation.



COMMONLY REPORTED ISSUES:

# HEALTH CARE



- » Delays in medical attention and follow-up care, including long waits for physicians, dentists, and prescription refills.
- » Inconsistent communication from Health Services and lack of transparency about the status of referrals or treatment.
- » Insufficient access to mental health care, particularly for individuals with complex or long-term needs.
- » Mental health services in maximum security described as especially limited, with concerns that restrictive conditions worsened symptoms.
- » Breach of confidentiality, including reported mishandling of health records and improper disclosure of medical information.
- » Unclear or contradictory information regarding medical isolation procedures during COVID-19 outbreaks.
- » Limited affordability and inconsistent availability of basic health-related items such as menstrual products, sunscreen, and over the counter medication.

COMMONLY REPORTED ISSUES:

## CONDITIONS IN THE MAXIMUM-SECURITY UNITS AND STRUCTURED INTERVENTION UNITS

- » Degrading or unsafe physical conditions, such as broken windows, cold temperatures, mold, and sewage issues.
- » Inadequate heating and insulation, with individuals reporting the use of towels or pads to block cold drafts.
- » Restricted access to hygiene, showers, fresh air, and natural light.
- » Conflicting or limited scheduling that required individuals to choose between yard, phone, or computer time.
- » Significant barriers to programming, work, and legal materials.
- » Restricted access to advocacy support, including challenges securing private space for legal or peer support meetings.
- » Reports of prolonged isolation and limited human contact, especially among individuals with mental health needs.
- » Concerns about SIU placement procedures, including cases where individuals were not promptly informed of the reason for their placement or did not receive timely mental health assessment
- » Significant barriers to culturally relevant services and support for Indigenous people, who are disproportionately classified as maximum-security.





#### COMMONLY REPORTED ISSUES:

### ACCESS TO THE GRIEVANCE SYSTEM AND PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS

- » Failure to meet grievance timelines set by CSC policy, with little explanation provided.
- » Request and grievance forms returned unsigned or incomplete, delaying resolution.
- » Fear of reprisal or futility in submitting grievances, with individuals reporting they were discouraged or ignored.
- » Limited access to legal and policy materials, impeding individuals' ability to understand and exercise their rights.

#### COMMONLY REPORTED ISSUES:

### SECURITY REVIEWS AND CLASSIFICATION

- » Lack of transparency in security decisions, with individuals not adequately informed of the rationale behind their classification.
- » Security levels maintained without meaningful input or recognition of reported progress.
- » Limited access to programs, employment, or case management cited as reasons for stalled progress, despite individuals' willingness to participate.
- » Disproportionate classification of Indigenous and racialized individuals as maximum-security.
- » Lack of access to culturally appropriate supports that could assist in demonstrating readiness for reduced security.