



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

December 19th, 2025

Re: CAEFS Regional Advocacy Visit, December 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 December 3rd, 9th and 10th, 2025.

This letter also includes a summary of the discussion that took place during the meeting on December 18th, 2025, relevant laws and policies, and CAEFS' positions.

Thank you, and we look forward to your response.

Access to Family

Description: CAEFS received many reports related to delays in Visits and Correspondence (V&C) and institutional processes preventing access to their family and community contacts. It was reported that multiple visits have been cancelled and not yet rescheduled. Individuals reported their families are spending time and resources, including taking time off work and purchasing airfare, to have their visit cancelled.

It was noted that women and gender-diverse people felt weary to invite their families to visit, knowing that the Private Family Visitation (PFV) unit "is not dependable", and in consideration of the significant resources that arranging a PFV requires.

CAEFS also received a report that even video visits have associated barriers. One, for example, was not facilitated recently, due to staff not having the required key.

It was also noted by multiple individuals that the Nova Christmas Social event was set to take place on Saturday, December 13th, however the Social Programs Officer (SPO) did not receive a list of approved visitors for the social until Wednesday, December 10th, and that this left many families panicked and with insufficient time to make arrangements to attend the event.

Discussion: Management explained that they have struggled with staffing issues in V&C and have designated extra support to this area, and as well, have plans to address this issue further in the new year. The management team



were unaware that a video visit was interrupted due to a missing key and offered to investigate individual circumstances if consent was provided. Management were also unaware there were delays with processing approvals for the Christmas social, however they notified that this event was subsequently rescheduled for this coming Saturday, December 20th, due to a lack of staffing capacity.

Law and Policy:

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;

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 institution ensures timely processing of all V&C requests and maintains adequate staffing to prevent disruptions in access to family, as this is a critical, essential provision that the CSC is responsible for facilitating. Barriers to access to family produce significant and lasting adverse outcomes for federally sentenced women and gender-diverse people, and the particularly harmful and known impacts that barriers to familial contact have on women are a central reason that the regionalized model of federal incarceration for women was supported in Canada. From heightened immediate emotional distress to the long-term fracturing of familial bonds and isolation, and lowered reintegration potential, there are serious consequences that stem from barriers to access to family.

Conditions of Confinement in Medium Security - Heating

Description: CAEFS received reports of some living units and individual cells in medium security being particularly cold and not having adequate heating.

Discussion: Management was previously unaware of the heating issues and will assign staff to look into this matter.

Law and Policy:

CCRF s.12: Everyone has the right not to be subjected to any cruel and unusual treatment or punishment.

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.

Recommendation: CAEFS appreciates Management's attention to the reported maintenance issues. CAEFS encourages the institution to maintain adequate heating in all living units and cells, to ensure conditions of confinement are safe, dignity preserving, and humane.

Access to Indigenous Culture



Description: CAEFS met with an individual who has asked for further intervention following repeated unsuccessful self-advocacy attempts for access to cultural materials. She has requested an individual smudge kit, and this request was denied, stating she could access a communal smudge kit, and could continue to meet with the Indigenous Liaison Officer (ILO) as well as access Indigenous supports. She has grieved this matter, stating that she has witnessed the communal materials available be misused, and does not wish to connect spiritually to materials that do not belong to her. She notes that at one time, she was told she could not access a smudge kit due to there not being a bi-racial Indigenous designation on the “Offender Management System” (OMS).

Discussion: Management acknowledges the barrier presented by the OMS system regarding bi-racial designation, further explaining that by changing one’s designation on OMS from ethno-cultural to Indigenous, they could risk losing supports specific to their prior designation. In relation to the specific individual, Management explained that the issue is rooted in the strained relationship between this person and the Elder. It was clarified that cultural items are provided by the Elder, and not the institution itself, and was recommended that this person reach out in attempt to amend the relationship with the Elder.

Law and Policy:

CCRA s.80: Without limiting the generality of section 76, the Service shall provide programs designed particularly to address the needs of Indigenous [incarcerated persons].

CCRA, section 4(d): [People who are incarcerated] retain the rights of all members of society except those that are, as a consequence of the sentence, lawfully and necessarily removed or restricted.

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.

CD 702 Annex E: [Incarcerated persons] may request the Institutional Head or delegate (in consultation with the Elder/Spiritual Advisor) to allow that spiritual, cultural or traditional items (e.g. medicines, medicine bags/pouches, feathers) remain with their cell effects. Cultural items (e.g. medicines, medicine pouches, feathers) are considered to have no monetary value; however, they are deemed to have significant spiritual value.

Recommendation: CAEFS encourages institutional management to review the current practice regarding how women and gender diverse people incarcerated at NIFW gain access to Indigenous spiritual and cultural items, including individual smudge kits. In addition to items arriving through an Elder, there should also be opportunities for such items to be sent in from community and to be held as cell effects (or personal property of the incarcerated person) People in prison retain all rights as every person in Canada, except those necessarily limited, and restricting spiritual and cultural items to exclusive entry through an Elder poses numerous challenges and limitation to people fundamental constitutional rights, as well as to several legal principles enshrined in the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

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 114, with 1 person currently in the SIU.



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

