



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

**Re: February 2026 Advocacy Visit Follow-Up**

March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2026

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 March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 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 February 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, 2026. It also includes our summary of the discussion that took place during the meeting mentioned above, relevant laws and policies, and CAEFS' recommendations.

During CAEFS' February visit to FVI, the penitentiary's population inclusive of all three security classifications was 105, with no one incarcerated in the Structured Intervention Unit.

### **1. Correctional Service of Canada Security Threat Group De-Affiliation Practices and Policy**

**Description:** It was reported to advocates that individuals seeking to de-affiliate from a Security Threat Group (STG) are being asked, during de-affiliation assessment interviews with the penitentiary's Security Intelligence Officer (SIO), to provide the names of other individuals alleged to be gang members and to share information regarding gang-affiliated activities. Individuals indicated that they felt required to provide this information to successfully de-affiliate and have the STG designation removed from their file. People expressed concerns that providing such information could expose them to retaliatory violence from gang members, leaving them feeling as though they must choose between their physical safety and the removal of the STG designation. It was reported that this practice can exacerbate lateral violence between incarcerated peers and create divisions within the population.

Advocates were also informed that this practice of requesting gang information in the de-affiliation assessment interview by the SIO has been incorporated into an updated version of Commissioner's Directive (CD) 568-3: Identification and Management of Security Threat Groups. The Inmate Wellness Committee at FVI reported concerns about the incorporation of this CSC practice into policy and confirmed with advocates that this feedback was provided in their CD 568-3 policy consultation with IMT.

**Discussion:** IMT said they will follow up with the SIO regarding this practice and will continue to follow policy and corresponding policy updates.

### **Law/Policy:**

Corrections and Conditional Release Act, section 3(a): The purpose of the federal correctional system is to contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by carrying out sentences imposed by courts through the safe and humane custody and supervision of [federally sentenced people].

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 people, visible minorities, persons requiring mental health care and other groups.

CCRA, section 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 encourages FVI to review and assess the impacts of its current de-affiliation practices on both the individual and the broader penitentiary population. CAEFS further recommends that CSC strengthen and expand partnerships with external organizations that provide peer-led support for individuals seeking to disengage from gangs, in alignment with its reintegration mandate. Additionally, CSC should ensure that the requirements and expectations for being de-affiliated are clearly communicated to incarcerated individuals, and that relevant assessment tools and criteria are made publicly accessible to promote transparency and procedural fairness.

## **2. Access to Mental Health Supports**

**Description:** Advocates received reports that incarcerated individuals are being asked by CSC staff to intervene during the mental health crises of their peers. Specifically, individuals reported that, during a recent mental health incident in the Structured Living Environment, CSC staff directed them to provide frontline support and attempt to de-escalate the situation. Those involved said that they felt fearful for their physical safety and inadequately prepared to respond to the severity of their peer's mental health crisis. Despite these concerns, they reported feeling instructed by the CSC and therefore obligated to intervene. Individuals shared this was not an isolated occurrence, and that similar requests have been made by CSC staff in the past during other mental health incidents.

Advocates also received reports that CSC staff are not consistently adhering to individuals established mental health emergency plans created with their healthcare team. Instead, it was reported that force has been used in circumstances where less restrictive measures had already been identified in the mental health emergency plan by the individual and their healthcare providers.

**Discussion:** IMT shared that mental health intervention plans are sent via email to appropriate CSC staff as well as indicated in the Inter-Disciplinary meeting notes for individuals incarcerated in the maximum-security unit. IMT added that relevant information is also available on the [Incarcerated Person] Management System and is accessible to frontline staff.



**Law/Policy:**

CCRA, section 3(a): The purpose of the federal correctional system is to contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by carrying out sentences imposed by courts through the safe and humane custody and supervision of [federally sentenced people].

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

CCRA, section 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 responsibility to provide safe and humane care for individuals in federal penitentiaries, where they rely on staff and contractors for health services, CSC must adopt additional measures to protect the dignity and well-being of those in its care. Access to appropriate, trauma-informed health care is essential, not only to meet community standards but also to support meaningful engagement in correctional plans and successful reintegration.

### 3. Impacts of the Penitentiary Environment on Individuals with Life Sentences

**Description:** Individuals with life sentences continue to report a need for increased access to material items, such as clothing, hygiene products, and basic electronics, to account for the length of their incarceration. Advocates learned that people with life sentences rely primarily on penitentiary-issued clothing, which they described as negatively affecting their self-esteem, sense of dignity, and confidence in preparing for eventual reintegration into the community. Section 25 of Commissioner's Directive (CD) 566-12: Personal Property of [Incarcerated Individuals] was identified as particularly harmful to people with life sentences, as it prohibits direct gift-giving between incarcerated individuals. People with life sentences reported that individuals with shorter sentences who are preparing for release often wish to gift personal items to those remaining in custody, recognizing their limited access to material goods. However, as this practice is prohibited, any transfer of items may result in disciplinary charges or other unintended consequences for the recipient, compounding existing hardship. It was further reported that acts of gifting are frequently interpreted by the CSC as attempts to settle drug-related debts, rather than as expressions of solidarity and mutual support among incarcerated individuals.

Advocates received reports that several elderly individuals with life sentences were recently returned to the penitentiary on temporary detention. It was shared that some individuals are returning with dementia or Alzheimer's disease and may not be receiving the level of mental and physical health support required to meet their complex needs in the penitentiary environment.

Advocates were also informed of ways in which the Lifers' Committee- a peer-led committee representing the needs of individuals with life sentences at FVI- could contribute more consistently to the penitentiary environment. Currently, the Committee is unable to access the maximum-security unit to introduce themselves to newly admitted individuals with life sentences, limiting opportunities for connection and peer support at a critical time. It was also noted that the Chair and Co-Chair positions of the Committee are not paid employment positions at the penitentiary. Given the challenges associated with maintaining a consistent committee presence, it was suggested that providing compensation for these roles could



support greater stability and continuity. Such measures may strengthen the Committee's capacity to meaningfully represent and advocate for the needs of individuals with life sentences at FVI.

**Discussion:** IMT stated that they abide by policy and are unable to accommodate additional items for people with life sentences. IMT informed advocates that when people with life sentences are returned to FVI on temporary detention, they work with community healthcare providers to ensure continuity of care. Additionally, IMT discussed programs previously available to people incarcerated at FVI and how existing relationships with local thrift stores can be leveraged to support the people with life sentences.

#### **Law/Policy:**

CCRA, section 5: There shall continue to be a correctional service in and for Canada, to be known as the Correctional Service of Canada, which shall be responsible for (a) the care and custody of [incarcerated people]; (b) the provision of programs that contribute to the rehabilitation of [incarcerated people] and to their successful reintegration into the community; (c) the preparation of [incarcerated persons] for release.

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 people, visible minorities, persons requiring mental health care and other groups.

CCRA, section 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 encourages the Correctional Service of Canada to examine the impacts of policies such as CD 566-12 on individuals experiencing long-term incarceration and to amend CSC policies and practices to better reflect the lived realities of federally incarcerated people. CAEFS further encourages CSC to consider the impacts of long-term incarceration on the physical, emotional, and psychological health and well-being of those in its care and custody, and to explore alternatives to continued incarceration that mitigate these harms and support CSC's mandate of rehabilitation and reintegration.

#### **4. Access to Harm Reduction Supports**

**Description:** Advocates were informed of a need for additional substance use supports at FVI. Individuals shared that they are unclear about the location of naloxone kits within their respective living units on the main compound and expressed concerns about timely access in the event of an overdose. Individuals further indicated that additional harm reduction resources and services should be made available within the penitentiary to better support those who use substances. It was also emphasized that individuals accessing these supports should be encouraged and supported, rather than punished by the penitentiary.

**Discussion:** IMT informed advocates that naloxone kits are available in every living unit on the main compound, on both floors in the minimum-security unit, and also on the two ranges in the maximum-security unit. IMT encouraged advocates to contact the Inmate Wellness Committee to learn the exact locations of the naloxone kits.



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

CD 800 (Health Services), section 17: All staff and contractors (including non-health) will respond to medical emergencies. The primary goal is the preservation of life while ensuring the personal safety of staff and other individuals. Once on the scene, the health care professional or the ambulance service assumes responsibility for the medical response, as appropriate.

**CAEFS Recommendations:** Given CSC's responsibility to provide safe and humane custody for individuals in federal penitentiaries —where they rely on staff and contractors for health services, referrals, and emergency care— CSC must look for additional measures to ensure the dignity and well-being of those in its care. CAEFS advocates for the provision of substance use healthcare in community by harm reduction community organizations as the penitentiary environment prioritizes security over the health and well-being of incarcerated people.

## 5. Access to Grievance Procedure

**Description:** Individuals across all security classifications reported reluctance to utilize the CSC grievance procedure due to fear of retaliation by CSC staff, particularly correctional officers and institutional parole officers (IPO). Individuals indicated that, after submitting grievances, they experienced what they perceived to be increased scrutiny or targeting by correctional officers. They described feeling antagonized and expressed concern that filing a grievance could result in their day-to-day conditions within the penitentiary becoming more difficult. Individuals also expressed fear of grieving their IPO prior to security classification or conditional release opportunities as they reported fearing the support of their IPO to change due to the grievance. It was also reported that individuals are not consistently being offered an opportunity for informal resolution by the charging officer prior to receiving a notification of disciplinary charge.

**Discussion:** IMT and CAEFS advocates did not have time during the IMT meeting to discuss this reported concern. IMT said they will address access to the grievance procedure as a reported concern in their response to CAEFS' February systemic advocacy letter.

**Law/Policy:**

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

CCRA, section 90: There shall be a procedure for fairly and expeditiously resolving [federally sentenced people's] grievances on matters within the jurisdiction of the Commissioner [...].



CCRA, section 91: Every [federally sentenced person] shall have complete access to the [internal] grievance procedure without negative consequences.

**CAEFS Recommendations:** The grievance system is the legislated tool through which individuals can resolve the issues they face. When incarcerated people utilize the complaint and grievance process, they are resolving conflict in ways that align with law, policy, and the principles of Creating Choices. CAEFS is committed to fostering a climate of legal literacy within penitentiaries and hope that FVI will actively work alongside us to ensure that access to the system is supported, accessible, and free from barriers.

## 6. Access to Conditional Release

**Description:** People continue to report waiting weeks, sometimes months, for their first Escorted Temporary Absence. The population indicated that these delays have a cascading impact on subsequent release opportunities. Individuals also reported that delays in completing required psychological assessments are affecting timely access to day parole at or near their eligibility dates. Individuals reported submitting requests to their case management team for several months to ensure that these assessments were completed by the penitentiary in advance of their eligibility for day parole. However, due to operational constraints, these assessments were not completed in a timely manner, resulting in delays to individuals' access to day parole.

Due to the increased number of people incarcerated at FVI over the past three months, the population identified timely access to conditional release opportunities as a practical and constructive strategy to help alleviate overcrowding while supporting reintegration objectives.

**Discussion:** IMT and CAEFS advocates did not have time during the IMT meeting to discuss this reported concern. IMT said they will address informal resolution as a reported concern in their response to CAEFS' February systemic advocacy letter.

### **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 5: There shall continue to be a correctional service in and for Canada, to be known as the Correctional Service of Canada, which shall be responsible for (a) the care and custody of [incarcerated people]; (b) the provision of programs that contribute to the rehabilitation of [incarcerated people] and to their successful reintegration into the community; (c) the preparation of [incarcerated persons] for release.

CD 700 (Correctional interventions), section 10(e): Parole officers will facilitate the reintegration of [people who are incarcerated] into community at the earliest possible date while ensuring public and staff safety in all case management decisions.

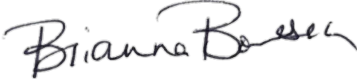
**CAEFS Recommendations:** Ensuring consistent access to reintegration opportunities through temporary absences including escorted temporary absences and work releases aligns with CSC's legislated purpose, as conditional release



provides the strongest opportunity for successful reintegration. The Parole Board of Canada emphasizes that gradual, structured release, known as the continuum of release, is the most effective approach to community reintegration.

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

Lead Advocate, Pacific Regional Advocacy Team, CAEFS

