



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

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

March 27<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 20<sup>th</sup>, 2026. 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 March 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.

On March 20<sup>th</sup>, FVI's population inclusive of all three security classifications was 105, with one individual incarcerated in the Structured Intervention Unit.

**1. Access to Family: Compassionate Escorted Temporary Absence**

**Description:** CAEFS received the signed consent of an individual classified as medium security at FVI to discuss their access to an Escorted Temporary Absence (ETA) for compassionate purposes. The individual reported that a close family member's health had deteriorated significantly and that they were encouraged to visit now, prior to the individual's passing.

The individual is Indigenous and reported being approved for a voluntary transfer to a section 81 Healing Lodge and was awaiting the next inter-regional flight. They expressed a desire to initiate the process for a compassionate ETA while still incarcerated at FVI to expedite the timeline of the ETA following their transfer, as their family member resides in a northern community in the same province as the section 81 Healing Lodge. The individual requested that CAEFS raise this matter with the IMT, noting that compassionate ETAs can be logistically complex and require coordination especially given their family member's remote location.

**Discussion:** IMT provided advocates with an update regarding this case and confirmed that arrangements are being made to ensure this individual has access to a compassionate ETA to visit family as soon as practicable.

**Law/Policy:**

Corrections and Conditional Release Act, section 4 (c.1): the Service considers alternatives to custody in a penitentiary, including the alternatives referred to in sections 29 and 81.

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 17 (1): The institutional head may [...] authorize the temporary absence of an [incarcerated person] [...] if the [incarcerated person] is escorted by a staff member or other person authorized by the institutional head and, in the opinion of the institutional head [...] (b) it is desirable for the [incarcerated person] to be absent from the penitentiary for [...] compassionate reasons.

**CAEFS Recommendations:** One of the core reasons for establishing federal penitentiaries designated for women in each region was to promote close community and familial contact for incarcerated women and gender-diverse people. This case underscores the challenges faced by Indigenous individuals from remote communities and reserves, and the significant barriers they encounter in returning home to visit family members- even when penitentiary staff are supportive. This reality highlights the urgent need for alternatives to custodial sentences for Indigenous people to mitigate the disproportionate and harmful impacts of incarceration on Indigenous individuals and their families.

## 2. Use of Disciplinary System

**Description:** Individuals reported that correctional officers (COs) are quick to reference or threaten disciplinary charges during routine interactions with incarcerated people. Advocates learned that when directives from COs are unclear and/or appear inconsistent with federal legislation or Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) policy, people feel obligated to comply before attempting to seek clarification or engage in dialogue due to being threatened with disciplinary charges. This dynamic was described as exacerbating power imbalances between incarcerated people and CSC staff, and as limiting opportunities for meaningful and prosocial communication, including efforts to understand CO directives or raise concerns regarding the potential safety implications of directives.

It was further noted that disciplinary charges can have significant consequences for incarcerated people, including impeding progress made in correctional planning and programming, accessing lower security classifications and eligibility for conditional release, as well as the financial penalties that can be imposed on individuals where disciplinary charges are upheld through the penitentiary disciplinary system.

**Discussion:** IMT stated that correctional officers are encouraged to utilize de-escalation strategies and that, in CSC documentation, warnings are often recorded as having been provided prior to the laying of disciplinary charges. Advocates noted that discrepancies may exist between the experiences of incarcerated individuals and what is recorded by CSC staff in incident reports. IMT shared that individuals who receive disciplinary charges are encouraged to prepare a rebuttal and present their account of the incident during disciplinary court proceedings.

### **Law/Policy:**



CCRA, section 38: The purpose of the disciplinary system established by sections 40 to 44 and the regulations is to encourage [incarcerated people] to conduct themselves in a manner that promotes the good order of the penitentiary, through a process that contributes to [incarcerated peoples'] rehabilitation and successful reintegration into the community.

CCRA s. 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.

CCRR s. 34(b): Before imposing a sanction described in section 44 of the Act, the person conducting a hearing of a disciplinary offence shall consider [...] the least restrictive measure that would be appropriate in the circumstances.

**CAEFS Recommendations:** The formal disciplinary system should be used only as a last resort, given its significant and lasting impact on the liberty of federally sentenced women and gender-diverse people. CAEFS encourages the CSC to consider how the inherent power imbalance between incarcerated individuals and penitentiary staff may shape interactions, including the ability of individuals to seek clarification, raise concerns, or engage in dialogue without fear of retaliation. CAEFS recommends that CSC strengthen the consistent application of de-escalation practices, ensure that directives are communicated clearly and in accordance with legislation and policy, and enhance oversight mechanisms to identify and address discrepancies between staff reporting and the lived experiences of incarcerated individuals.

### 3. Access to Informal Resolution

**Description:** Individuals at FVI reported limited access to informal resolution processes when issued minor or major disciplinary charges by penitentiary staff. Advocates were advised that informal resolution is routinely indicated on the Notification of Disciplinary Charge; however, individuals reported that informal resolution was neither offered nor engaged in by the charging correctional officer.

Like the topic reported above, people at FVI shared feeling unable to use their communication skills with penitentiary staff to clear up misunderstandings or better understand directives from CSC staff.

**Discussion:** IMT stated that staff are required to demonstrate the consideration of informal resolution in disciplinary charges. IMT also encouraged people incarcerated at FVI to put in requests to the charging officer for informal resolution.

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

CCRA, section 4(f): correctional decisions are made in a forthright and fair manner, with access by the [person who is incarcerated] to an effective grievance procedure.

CCRA, section 38: The purpose of the disciplinary system established by sections 40 to 44 and the regulations is to encourage [incarcerated people] to conduct themselves in a manner that promotes the good order of the penitentiary, through a process that contributes to the inmates' rehabilitation and successful reintegration into the community.



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.

**CAEFS Recommendations:** Informal resolution is the legislated tool to mitigate use of the formal disciplinary system within the penitentiary environment. Both minor and major disciplinary convictions have profoundly negative impacts on the liberty of people who are incarcerated, and formal disciplinary actions are legislated to be imposed as a last resort because they have significant impacts on the present and future liberty of federally sentenced women and gender diverse people. CAEFS recommends that the legislation be closely followed, and informal resolution should be utilized in all possible instances.

#### 4. Impacts of Incarceration on Financial Stability and Agency

**Description:** Individuals at FVI continue to report on the barriers to financial stability created by their federal incarceration status. It was shared that Level A pay (\$6.90/day) is challenging to access due to the requirement of “a high level of accountability” under Annex B of Commissioner’s Directive 730. This criterion prevents individuals who maintain their innocence from receiving the highest level of pay offered at the penitentiary.

People report ongoing deduction and/or payment errors by the finance department affecting individuals’ accessible banking accounts. These issues directly impact access to family and community by limiting the funds available for outgoing calls from the penitentiary. It was also reported that written requests to finance, seeking correction of errors or clarification of institutional financial statements, often go unanswered or are insufficiently addressed. In response to these ongoing reported concerns, the Inmate Wellness Committee has proposed the creation of a financial clerk position, to be held by an incarcerated person, to support financial literacy at FVI. The Committee has also offered to gather questions from the population and facilitate a bi-monthly phone call with a finance department representative.

**Discussion:** IMT encouraged incarcerated individuals to request meetings with the finance department. IMT raised privacy concerns regarding the proposed population-held financial clerk position. However, they expressed openness to alternative approaches, noting that a proposal for an Inmate Wellness Committee representative to meet with finance, or to establish ongoing calls to address population-identified financial concerns, was of interest. IMT encouraged individuals at FVI to use existing financial resources currently available within the penitentiary.

#### **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 4(c.2): The Service ensures the effective delivery of programs to [incarcerated people] including correctional, educational, vocational training and volunteer programs, with a view to improving access to alternatives to custody in a penitentiary and to promoting rehabilitation.

CCRA, section 76: The Service shall provide a range of programs designed to address the needs of [incarcerated people] and contribute to their successful reintegration into the community.



**CAEFS Recommendations:** CAEFS encourages the CSC nationally to evaluate the systemic and rehabilitative impacts of compensating federally incarcerated individuals at daily rates that are significantly less than the hourly minimum wage in all provinces and territories. CSC should extend the rights and protections guaranteed to Canadian workers to incarcerated people who are employed within federal penitentiaries.

## 5. Consultation and Participation in Correctional Planning and Decision-Making

**Description:** Advocates received reports that individuals are not being consulted in correctional decision-making processes that directly impact them, including Security Level Reviews and corresponding Warden’s Boards. These boards involve meetings between the incarcerated individual, their case management team, and the Institutional Head (Warden) to review security classification and provide the individual with an opportunity to advocate for a lower classification. In one reported instance, an individual did not receive a copy of their Security Level Review from their case management team and was not notified of their scheduled Warden’s Board. As a result, the individual did not attend the hearing, was unable to contribute to the decision-making process, and was subsequently maintained at a higher security classification. The individual reported feeling discouraged and frustrated by the lack of consultation and opportunity for participation, particularly given that such reviews typically occur once every two years.

Across all security classifications, individuals reported infrequent contact with their primary workers and institutional parole officers, resulting in concerns that case management reports may not accurately reflect their circumstances, progress, or perspectives. Individuals indicated that these challenges are exacerbated in situations where their assigned primary worker is stationed in a different security classification, for example, when a person classified as medium security is assigned a primary worker based in a maximum-security unit, further limiting opportunities for meaningful engagement and communication. It was also reported that individuals do not feel able to access CSC reporting prior to its finalization and being “locked” in the [Incarcerated Person] Management System. Individuals described feeling disconnected from their case management teams and indicated that this limits their ability to meaningfully contribute to CSC documentation, including correctional plans and updates.

**Discussion:** IMT informed advocates that draft documents are not shared with incarcerated people due to the workloads of case management teams, but that consultation on documents is required as a part of procedural fairness. IMT encourages people incarcerated at FVI to reach out to their primary workers as they should be their primary contact over the course of their incarceration.

### **Law/Policy:**

CCRA, section 4 (f): Correctional decisions are made in a forthright and fair manner, with access by the [incarcerated person] to an effective grievance procedure.

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 15.1: (1) The institutional head shall cause a correctional plan to be developed in consultation with the offender as soon as practicable after their reception in a penitentiary. (2) The plan is to be maintained in



consultation with the [incarcerated person] in order to ensure that they receive the most effective programs at the appropriate time in their sentence to rehabilitate them and prepare them for reintegration into the community, on release, as a law-abiding citizen.

**CAEFS Recommendations:** The inclusion of incarcerated people in decisions about their correctional planning and liberty is foundational to realizing the principles of Creating Choices and the purpose of the CSC. This requirement is entrenched through multiple sections of the CCRA. CAEFS encourages the CSC to foster a deeper culture of information sharing and participation in decision making process between penitentiary staff and incarcerated individuals and encourage case management teams to spend more time engaging with the people that they work with to ensure consultation on both correction plans and correctional plan updates.

## 6. Access to Meaningful Employment Opportunities

**Description:** Advocates received reports of limited employment opportunities at FVI that support the development of skills transferable to the community upon release. Individuals identified a need for a broader range of employment options, particularly for those aging in custody and those with varying physical and cognitive abilities. Advocates also noted interest in expanding access to office- and computer-based administrative roles. Individuals reported that long-term incarceration creates barriers to technology use and familiarity, and that increased access to such positions could support skill development relevant to community reintegration.

Individuals in the minimum-security unit (MSU) further reported an insufficient number of employment positions, and currently no work release opportunities offered by the penitentiary. Individuals identified work releases as an important support for gradual reintegration, providing opportunities to re-acclimate to community living post-incarceration.

**Discussion:** Due to time constraints, this concern was not discussed in detail during the meeting. However, IMT shared that multiple employment opportunities are currently posted on the employment board within the minimum-security unit. IMT noted that additional opportunities are expected to become available as the seasons transition, with an increase in employment options anticipated during the spring and summer months.

### **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 4(c.2): The Service ensures the effective delivery of programs to [incarcerated people] including correctional, educational, vocational training and volunteer programs, with a view to improving access to alternatives to custody in a penitentiary and to promoting rehabilitation.

**CAEFS Recommendations:** CAEFS recommends for the CSC to extend the rights and protections guaranteed to Canadian workers in the Canadian Labour Code to incarcerated people employed by the CSC. CAEFS is encouraged to learn of new employment positions created at FVI and that institutional management is aware of the need for more employment options at the penitentiary. We are looking forward to hearing more about expanded meaningful employment options for the people incarcerated at FVI.



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

