



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

March 24th, 2026

CAEFS' February 2026 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 March 4th via Teams.

This letter summarizes reports we received and conditions we observed during our visit to the Grand Valley Institution on February 24th to 26th 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

Access to Adequate Health Care and Dental Care

Description: The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) continues to receive numerous reports of barriers to accessing health and dental care. Individuals have shared that there are long wait times to see the dentist, resulting in extended periods where treatment needs go unaddressed. This can lead to more serious dental issues, including the need for teeth to be pulled and people have shared their fear at thought of needing multiple extractions. People have shared that multiple extractions create a stigma of bad dental hygiene and can affect opportunities in the community.

Across all security levels, individuals have further shared that they often feel disrespected by healthcare staff and that their symptoms are dismissed. People have also reported limited access to over-the-counter medications when they are experiencing cold and flu symptoms as well as limited options on canteen to deal with their symptoms. People are left to manage their symptoms and remain in discomfort and have to wait for their symptoms to subside with no aid.

In the minimum-security unit (MSU), individuals reported additional barriers to accessing healthcare. They indicated that they are required to explain their symptoms to correctional officers, who determine whether they will be able to see someone from healthcare. Individuals have shared that they are often left in discomfort while waiting for their symptoms to be addressed and expressed that they feel this process is inhumane, as they are expected to disclose their private medical concerns to correctional officers to be seen by a nurse.

Discussion: The Institutional Management Team (IMT) shared that they have conducted an investigation into complaints regarding dental care and found that the current process does not meet policy standards related to triaging. They indicated that they are working to address these issues and are reviewing the process with staff. The IMT also shared that an email has been sent to all staff advising that correctional officers should not ask individuals in the MSU to provide details about their symptoms when requesting access to health services. Moving forward, they noted that anyone who feels their symptoms have been dismissed by nursing staff should raise the concern directly with the Manager of Health Services, who will follow up with the nursing staff.

Law & Policy:

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.

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

CD 800 s.2: The Regional Director, Health Services, will ensure:

(a) the provision of health services to [incarcerated persons] in Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) institutions and in the community, in accordance with relevant legislation, professionally accepted standards, CSC policies and practice directives

(b) implementation of procedures to monitor and evaluate the quality and timeliness of health services and in a manner that promotes patient safety and quality improvement.

CAEFS' Recommendations: Federally sentenced women and gender diverse people are reliant on penitentiary staff and contractors to provide health services, referrals, emergency care and all access to health and dental care. CAEFS urges CSC to 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.



Accessibility of Parole and Parole Officers

Description: CAEFS continues to receive reports of barriers related to access to Parole Officers and parole hearings. Individuals have reported difficulty meeting with their Parole Officers on a regular basis, which limits their ability to discuss and address outstanding concerns related to their cases. People also shared that they have felt increasing pressure to sign waivers consenting to a thirty-day delay of their parole hearings, after being told that if they did not sign the waiver, the Parole Board could delay the hearing by sixty days. In some instances, these delays were reported to be related to incomplete or outstanding paperwork. Individuals described this process as stressful and expressed concern about the impact these delays may have on their parole timelines.

Discussion: The IMT shared that they required more detail or specific cases to be able to investigate further.

Note: CAEFS notes that the purpose of our disclosure is not to provide specific instances, unless individuals expressly request us to. Rather, it is more common that people report their experiences to CAEFS under assumed anonymity, providing a safe and independent channel for the population to express their needs and concerns. Where individuals who provide consent to disclose personal information can be helpful to resolving issues reported to CAEFS, a primary function of CAEFS IMT meetings are to make management aware of population concerns and what is reported to CAEFS, where federally incarcerated women and gender diverse people may otherwise feel uncomfortable raising their concerns.

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, s. 3: The purpose of the correctional system is to contribute to a just, peaceful, and safe society by carrying out sentences imposed by courts through the safe and human custody and supervision of incarcerated people and by assisting the rehabilitation of incarcerated people and their reintegration into community as law-abiding citizens.

CCRA s.4(b): the Service enhances its effectiveness and openness through the timely exchange of relevant information with victims, [incarcerated people] and other components of the criminal justice system and through communication about its correctional policies and programs to victims, [incarcerated people] and the public

CAEFS' Recommendations: Barriers to timely parole hearings, particularly when individuals feel pressured to sign waivers or postponements, have been a longstanding reported issue at GVI. While CAEFS appreciates the IMT's efforts to follow up with individuals, this concern is systemic and requires comprehensive review and action to support safe and timely reintegration. Especially given the ongoing population pressures at GVI, ensuring timely access to conditional release, in collaboration with parole officers, is critical to fulfilling CSC's legislative purpose.

Reported Barriers to Program Delivery

Description: CAEFS has received reports of frequent recreational program cancellations due to the unavailability of Social Program Officers, often with limited notice. Across all security levels, individuals have also shared that they are frequently given little to no advance notice about programs and events taking place within the institution. As a result, many miss these opportunities or find out about them too late.

Additionally, individuals have reported that the only two trade programs at GVI horticulture and small engines program are being discontinued, and that some education programs are being moved to an online format. These changes have raised



concerns about the loss of employment opportunities associated with the trade programs, as well as accessibility challenges for those who may struggle to participate in education programs that have been reduced or shifted online.

Discussion: The IMT shared that reports of the walking club being cancelled are related to colder weather days when the Social Program Officer cancels the activity due to weather conditions. They also noted that the inmate handbook outlines all programs and services available to the population, and that sign-up sheets are typically provided for events. If a sign-up sheet is not distributed, it is because the event is intended for a targeted group and only eligible participants will be contacted, such as for events like Black History Month programming. The IMT further explained that the horticulture and small engines programs were regionally funded and that the institution was recently notified that this funding will no longer continue as GVI cannot sustain the costs independently. However, the institution indicated that it would continue to explore other employment opportunities and projects for individuals that fall within the institution's budget. The IMT also shared that they have not received any indication or reports that education programs will be moved online.

Law & Policy:

CCRA s.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

CCRA s.4 (c2): the Service ensures the effective delivery of programs of [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 that the institution take steps to improve the accessibility of programming and employment opportunities. Given the discontinuation of the horticulture and small engine programs, CAEFS recommends that the institution implement alternative vocational and employment opportunities that provide meaningful work and skill development. Maintaining access to programming, education and skill-building opportunities is essential. These opportunities help individuals develop pro-social skills, responsibility, and independence that are critical for reintegration. This is consistent with the principles of Empowerment and Meaningful and Responsible Choices outlined in Creating Choices.

Reported Lack of Employment Opportunities

Description: CAEFS has received reports across all security levels that employment opportunities within the institution are limited, with long wait times to obtain a position. This situation has caused significant anxiety among individuals, as employment is often necessary to pay for necessities and is frequently identified as a requirement within their correctional plans. People have also expressed concern that, despite actively trying to secure employment, it may be noted in their files that they are not meeting expectations related to meaning employment.

Discussion: The IMT shared they continue to employ inmates as best they can. They shared often people cannot obtain employment because they do not meet the criteria for a position of trust, but the Program Manager has created a few positions to employ more inmates and continues to look for more employment opportunities.

Law & Policy:

CCRA s.4 (c2): the Service ensures the effective delivery of programs of [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 s. 3 The purpose of the federal correctional system is to contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by (b) 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.

CAEFS' Recommendations: CAEFS recommends that CSC increase opportunities for meaningful employment both within the penitentiary and through conditional release processes such as work releases. Employment is a key component of successful integration and is especially important for individuals held in maximum security, and in the women's sector, given the Creating choices model.

Adequate Nutrition

Description: CAEFS received reports that the removal of microwave turntables has created additional barriers to preparing food, particularly given that living units are already overcrowded and in some living units, individuals must share a single stove.

Additionally, in the maximum-security unit, individuals also reported finding plastic and hair in their food, and people shared that they are uncomfortable and concerned for their safety.

Discussion: The Institutional Management Team (IMT) shared that the microwave turntables were removed due to staff safety concerns, as they could potentially be broken and used as weapons. They indicated that they are exploring alternative options for turntables that would be less likely to break apart. Regarding the food concerns, the food services have been made aware of the issue and will look into it further.

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

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: Incarcerated people have the right to live in an environment that is safe, healthful, and free of practices that undermine a person's sense of personal dignity. This includes access to food that is safe and free from contamination as well as the ability to prepare meals without barriers. CAEFS encourages GVI and the CSC broadly to address and be responsive to issues that concern the safety, health and overall well-being of people.



Living Conditions

Description: CAEFS received reports that the furniture in the Private Family Visit (PFV) units has been replaced with institutional furniture. Individuals have shared that the institutional furniture is uncomfortable and that it may discourage their family members from visiting.

Discussion: The Institutional Management Team (IMT) shared that replacement furniture for the Private Family Visit units has already been ordered and will be installed soon.

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: CAEFS appreciates the IMT's quick response in addressing this issue and ordering adequate furniture for the PFV's. CAEFS encourages GVI and the CSC broadly to continue to address and be responsive to issues that concern the overall well-being of people.

Reports of Unverified Information in Paperwork

Description: CAEFS received reports that anonymous notes are being included in individuals' files before the information has been verified. Individuals also reported that when they submit requests for file corrections, the process is often delayed and takes longer than necessary. People have shared that this is detrimental to their progress, as the information becomes part of their files, potentially affecting decisions related to conditional releases and eventual reintegration.

Discussion: The IMT indicated that they would require specific cases to review these concerns. They also noted that individuals should raise these issues directly with their Parole Officer or Primary Worker and ensure they are clearly identifying the information they believe to be inaccurate when requesting file corrections, as this may help expedite the process.

Law & Policy:

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



CAEFS' Recommendations: CAEFS encourages GVI to respond to alleged intelligence in ways that prioritize least restrictive measures, reflect the principles of Creating Choices, and are aligned with the overall rehabilitative and reintegrative purpose of the CSC.

