



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

May 8, 2026

**Re: CAEFS Regional Advocacy Visit, April 2026**

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 on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, 2026. This letter also includes a summary of the discussion that took place during the meeting on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2026, relevant laws and policies, and CAEFS' positions. Thank you, and we look forward to your response.

**Follow Up – Conditions of Confinement – Hot Water and Heating**

**Description:** CAEFS received reports that people at Nova were without hot water for a period of nearly 24 hours. Hot water disruptions occurred in the evening and were not rectified until 4pm the following day, explaining that they were told the institution had run out of propane. Individuals shared with CAEFS that disruptions caused emotional stress, noting the lack of hygiene to have negative impacts on their mental health.

Participants in the mother child program (MCP) reported that previous periods of no heat in the minimum-security unit caused stress on both mom and baby. They shared that the use of additional blankets is not safe sleep practice for infants and stressed that a properly heated living space was the only suitable option. Heat had been restored at the time of CAEFS' visit; however, individuals wished to express their concerns regarding prior instances to CAEFS' at this time.

**Discussion:** Management shared with CAEFS that a hygiene plan has been created and will be used in the event of future hot water interruptions. Management stated that participants in the MCP were provided with space heaters during the period that the minimum-security unit did not have heat.

**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 recommends that CSC ensure uninterrupted access to essential services, including heat and hot water, with particular attention given to those who are participating in the mother child program, to ensure living conditions are safe and dignified.

### **Follow Up – Institutional Mother Child Program**

**Description:** CAEFS asked management for an update on the items discussed at last month's meeting, including infant food security, access to childcare, and institutional poverty because of the lack of childcare. CAEFS heard from participants in the Mother Child Program (MCP) during our April visit, who reported there still being a lack of babysitters available.

MCP participants shared with CAEFS that their application process for the program did not begin until they arrived at Nova, despite being aware of their federal placement here, and making several attempts to contact the institution several months prior to sentencing. They shared that the application process took 5 months to complete, during which time mom and baby were away from one another, despite proactive attempts to prevent this separation.

**Discussion:** Management did not provide an update on last month's issues, providing the response that the staff member who committed to follow up was absent. Management shared that delays in the MCP application process are due to its multi-step nature and the need to gather information from other agencies and noted that individuals can stay in contact with family through the program coordinator.

### **Law and Policy:**

*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.

*CD 768:* Purpose - To foster positive relationships between federally incarcerated mothers and their child, by keeping them together where appropriate, and providing a supportive environment that promotes stability and continuity for the mother-child relationship

**Recommendation:** CAEFS reiterates the need to address institutional poverty by providing appropriate compensation or back-pay where individuals are unable to work due to a lack of childcare. CAEFS further recommends immediate steps to ensure consistent and reliable access to childcare within the MCP to prevent ongoing gaps in care. CAEFS encourages CSC to initiate the application process in a timely manner — particularly where placement is known in advance — to prevent unnecessary and prolonged separation of mothers and infants. Ensuring timely access to the MCP, alongside adequate childcare and financial stability, is essential to the health and wellbeing of both parent and child.

### **Access to Healthcare**

**Description:** CAEFS heard from individuals who reported continued barriers to accessing the institution's dentist. It was reported that the dentist cancels often, with one individual noting that it took 6 months for the dentist to respond to their request. CAEFS also heard concerns from people regarding accessing general healthcare. CAEFS heard that individuals who have been required to switch medications due to changes in the national formulary do not feel supported in their transitions to new medications. The possibility of future changes to the formulary causes great anxiety and fear, noting that individuals feel as though they have no autonomy over their medical decisions. One



individual shared with CAEFS that they were fearful of being required to change medications, as going without her current prescription can, and has in the past, caused seizures. Another individual shared they “don’t want to do trial and error”, explaining that finding a medication regime that works best for them is a process they have already endured.

CAEFS heard concerns of individuals being unable to meet with a doctor and instead being referred to a nurse practitioner (NP). Some people shared that they have been refused healthcare for certain ailments. One individual noted that they were prescribed a medication by the NP that ultimately resulted in them attending the emergency room in community, where the doctor immediately discontinued this medication as it was lowering their heart rate to a dangerous level. They shared that they no longer feel confident in the care of the NP and feel as though their requests to see a doctor exclusively have been ignored.

**Discussion:** No staff members from the health care team were present at this meeting, and management was unable to comment on health-related reports.

#### **Law and Policy:**

*CCRA s. 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 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. 86 (2):* The provision of health care under subsection (1) shall conform to professionally accepted standards

**Recommendation:** CAEFS recommends that the institution ensure timely and quality access to healthcare services, including dental, as repeated cancellations, delayed responses to requests and barriers to physician access are causing unnecessary distress and anxiety. Given that individuals in CSC custody cannot seek care in the community, limitations on timely access contribute to prolonged suffering, deterioration of health, and reduced quality of life. CSC’s responsibility for care should reflect this dependency and ensure that health services are not unduly restricted where community access would otherwise be available.

#### **Access to Family**

**Description:** CAEFS heard reports from individuals who were unable to contact their family, due to delays in Visiting and Communications (V&C) processing. Along with general access to family, these delays also have substantial effects on one's ability to arrange belongings and funds to be sent to the institution. These delays have caused anxiety, sadness, and overall emotional stress.

CAEFS also inquired with management as to whether the private family visitation (PFV) unit was available for use, and if it has been utilized since January 2026.



**Discussion:** Management shared that individuals may contact family through their Parole Officer (PO), Personal Worker (PW), or the Family Liaison Officer (FLO), which is intended to bridge communication gaps during V&C processing, and that urgent requests will be accommodated when possible. They also noted that the PFV unit is available for use but were unsure if it has been used since January 2026.

#### **Law and Policy:**

*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

*CD 085 s. 18:* Telephone communication is a part of the overall program of reintegration into the community, similar to visits and temporary absences.

*CD 075 annex B s.b:* procedures for establishing or amending an [incarcerated persons] authorized call list (Call Allow List) - normally this should be processed within 15 working days of the [incarcerated persons] written request;

**Recommendation:** CAEFS recommends the timely processing of V&C approvals to prevent delays in contact with family and community supports. Delays in access to communication not only impact emotional wellbeing, but also create barriers to arranging essential personal affairs, including finances and belongings. CAEFS further recommends that processes for interim measures to family contact, such as support through staff, are consistently accessible and clearly communicated upon arrival. In addition, CAEFS encourages CSC to promote opportunities for private visitation whenever possible to support meaningful and consistent connections with family and community.

#### **Overcrowding**

**Description:** CAEFS received reports that the conditions of overcrowding have presented problems within the living units. Particularly, the appliances and facilities within the living units of medium security are reported to be inadequate, including refrigeration space. Individuals report that their ability to purchase and store fresh foods is limited by the amount of fridge space, noting that the increase in population size has not prompted the addition of appliances. Individuals also shared that storage for personal affects is inadequate, explaining that double-bunked individuals have access to only two drawers to store all of their belongings. CAEFS' also learned that several people require their mail to be hand delivered, as there are more people at Nova than there are mailboxes.

**Discussion:** Management shared that they are addressing the lack of storage and plan to install additional dressers in living units. They confirmed no extra appliances can be added after consulting tech services, noting that limited fridge space is partly due to individuals purchasing groceries separately instead of as a household. They also reported that 30 additional mailboxes have been obtained and are awaiting installation.

#### **Law and Policy:**

*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.



CCRA s. 70 (7): Population management strategies must include single occupancy when feasible and ensure that double bunking remains a temporary accommodation measure

**Recommendation:** CAEFS appreciates management's prompt response to concerns raised regarding storage and mail access, including steps to install additional dressers and mailboxes. CAEFS encourages CSC to consider broadly the psychological and emotional implications due to physical conditions of confinement, particularly double bunking of women and gender-diverse people. CAEFS recommends that CSC explore all possible alternatives to custody, lowering the amount of federally incarcerated women and gender-diverse people.

### **Food Security**

**Description:** CAEFS heard from individuals who have concerns surrounding food security at Nova. People shared that while the daily allowance for food increased from \$10.21 per day to \$12.77, grocery prices have also increased significantly, causing people to feel anxiety about food security and access to nutrition. One example shared with CAEFS was containers of coffee, which increased from \$11 to \$26. CAEFS' also received reports that individuals who are vegetarian or vegan do not feel as though they have adequate options available to them.

Further, individuals shared with CAEFS that food security within the institution is heavily dependent on interpersonal relationships and networking, because of the group feeding model. People shared that because prices are so high, they must pool resources together to acquire all ingredients needed for meals. Those who have recently arrived at Nova are often required to be fed by their housemates, if arriving prior to grocery order day. Individuals shared with CAEFS that if required to move housing units, all previously purchased food stays with the living unit, and the process of stocking ingredients restarts.

**Discussion:** Management acknowledged that food insecurity has been a longstanding issue at Nova, noting that the per diem has increased, and grocery prices will be frozen for the fiscal year. They said they work with suppliers to secure the best pricing, and noted new arrivals should be supported by on-site food services staff. Management also recognized that food hoarding stems from insecurity and is being addressed and noted that community gardens will resume in the spring to help provide fresh produce to living units.

### **Law and Policy:**

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

*The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) rule 20 s.1:* Every prisoner shall be provided by the prison administration at the usual hours with food of nutritional value adequate for health and strength, of wholesome quality and well prepared and served.

*GL 880-1: Purpose -* To ensure meals provided to the [incarcerated] population meet the appropriate nutritional and food safety standards for Canadians such as Canada's Food Guides and the Food Safety Code of Practice for Canada's Foodservice Industry.

**Recommendation:** CAEFS recommends that CSC ensure adequate access to nutrition for all individuals, including those with dietary restrictions. CAEFS further recommends taking additional steps to address rising food costs and



ongoing food insecurity, which continue to impact wellbeing and create reliance on informal supports. CAEFS also recommends that food support for new admissions is consistently accessible and clearly communicated upon arrival.

### **Access to Conditional Release**

**Description:** CAEFS heard reports that several people are being asked to delay their parole applications by their institutional parole officers (IPO). People shared that they are being told that if they want the support of their IPO, they must delay their application. However, they are not being given clear instructions as to what is needed to change the decision of the IPO. People shared that these unclear guidelines and requests to postpone induce anxiety, uncertainty and impede their ability to make plans with family and community supports.

Further, individuals report being denied opportunity to apply for, or experience significant delays in accessing, escorted temporary absences (ETA's) or unescorted temporary absences (UTA's).

**Discussion:** Management shared that clear objectives should be addressed in conversations with individuals and their IPOs, noting that institutional adjustment issues can lead to support being withheld. They will follow up to ensure these discussions are happening, though they suggested there may be a lack of accountability from individuals seeking parole. Regarding temporary absences, applications must align with the correctional plan, alongside general eligibility. Management emphasized their efforts to support releases, and added that when temporary absences are not approved, clear objectives are provided, with decisions guided by public safety considerations.

### **Law and Policy:**

*CCRA s. 3(b):* assisting the rehabilitation of [incarcerated persons] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community.

*CCRA s. 100:* The purpose of conditional release is to contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by means of decisions on the timing and conditions of release that will best facilitate the rehabilitation of [incarcerated persons] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens.

*CD s. 700 (5):* parole officers will facilitate the reintegration of [incarcerated people] into community at the earliest possible date while ensuring public and staff safety in all case management decisions.

**Recommendation:** CAEFS recommends that CSC improve access to conditional release by supporting individuals' right to apply for parole without delay, in every possible circumstance and ensure processes do not create barriers or pressure to postpone applications. This includes providing clear, consistent guidance on requirements to proceed, and ensuring case management practices are applied consistently so that IPO support is not contingent on delaying applications. CAEFS further recommends supporting access to temporary absences at the earliest possible opportunity.

### **Involuntary Transfers**



**Description:** CAEFS received reports of individuals being placed in maximum security following an incident that occurred, indicating they were told this is a “cool down period”. Individuals shared that when this occurs, they are affected financially, as they often lose their employed positions, as well as their ability to attend school or program. CAEFS heard from people who reported having less access to services within the institution due to being in maximum security, along with substantial impacts on individuals’ mental health.

**Discussion:** Management clarified that this is not a “cool down period,” but an institutional adjustment involving a change in security level. They shared interim placement procedures are being followed, including a review after 30 days, after which individuals may return to medium security if appropriate; until then, they remain in maximum security. Management acknowledged disruptions to programming and income, stating these occur because individuals require the structure of the secure unit.

**Law and Policy:**

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

CCRA s. 3: The purpose of the federal correctional system is to contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by (a) carrying out sentences imposed by courts through the safe and humane custody and supervision of [federally sentenced people]; and (b) assisting the rehabilitation of [federally sentenced people] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community.

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

**Recommendation:** CAEFS recommends that CSC use the least restrictive measures in response to incidents, avoiding unnecessary placement in maximum security where possible. Such placements should consider the significant impacts on employment, programming, income, and mental health, and prioritize continuity of access to services and supports that contribute to rehabilitation and reintegration.

**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 113, with 2 people currently incarcerated in the Structured Intervention Unit.

In closing and on behalf of CAEFS Atlantic Regional Advocacy team, I would like to thank the management team at Nova for continuing to have open dialogue, investigating the reports we raise, and engaging in solutions orientated discussions wherever possible.

Respectfully,

*S. Thompson*

Shelby Thompson  
Lead Advocate, Atlantic Regional Advocacy Team, CAEFS

