



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

Re: April 2026 Advocacy Visit Follow-Up

May 15th, 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 April 24th, 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 April 23rd and 24th, 2026. It also includes our summary of the discussion that took place during the meeting mentioned above, relevant laws and policies, and CAEFS' recommendations.

As of April 24th, the total incarcerated population at FVI was 104 across all three security classifications, including two individuals in the Structured Intervention Unit.

1. Impacts of Section 53 Search on Medium Population

During CAEFS' April 2026 advocacy visit, the medium-security population at FVI was put under section 53 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (CCRA), wherein the Institutional Head was satisfied, on reasonable grounds, that the presence of contraband constituted a danger to human life or safety, or to the security of the penitentiary, and accordingly authorized the use of exceptional search powers. The section 53 began on Monday, April 20th, and ended Friday, April 24th.

As a result of the section 53 search, the CAEFS Pacific Regional Advocacy Team was unable to meet with individuals classified as medium security during this month's advocacy visit. In recognition of the significant impacts of this exceptional search on the medium security population, this letter incorporates concerns reported by individuals at FVI regarding the search and its effects through the toll-free CAEFS National Advocacy Phone Line.

Description: CAEFS received multiple calls on its National Advocacy phone line from individuals classified as medium security at FVI regarding the impacts of the section 53 search. During the five-day search period, the medium-security population was placed on restricted movement and confined to their living units. Callers reported that all individuals in medium security were subjected to strip searches conducted by Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) staff. Individuals

described the impacts of strip searches as triggering, re-traumatizing, and destabilizing, noting that many federally incarcerated people have histories of sexual violence and trauma. CAEFS advocates also received reports that living units and individual cells were searched by CSC staff and left in disarray, requiring residents to use their restricted movement time to clean and reorganize their living spaces. It was also reported that access to healthcare was negatively impacted during the search, including the cancellation of medical Escorted Temporary Absences (ETAs) and an inability to access healthcare services on the main compound due to restricted movement. According to callers, CSC programming and employment were also suspended for the duration of the search.

Individuals in the medium security population at FVI reported that they understood the search to be related to an increase in the presence of drugs within the penitentiary. Advocates were advised that two drug-related overdoses occurred in the days preceding the search; both individuals survived. It was further reported that there is currently one substance use counsellor at FVI, and that existing substance use supports are insufficient to meet the needs of individuals experiencing substance use challenges. Callers emphasized that increased access to meaningful activities within the penitentiary, and access to both harm reduction and community-based supports would be beneficial to those actively in substance use.

Discussion: The concerns reported by the medium population at FVI through the CAEFS National Advocacy phone lines were not discussed at the institutional management team meeting on Friday, April 24th.

Law/Policy:

CCRA, section 4(c): The Service uses the least restrictive measures consistent with the protection of society, staff members and [incarcerated 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 persons, 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: Section 53 searches provide have significant impacts on individuals in CSC custody. CAEFS encourages CSC to consider the potential short- and long-term psychological effects of these searches. The Office of the Correctional Investigator's 2020 national investigation into sexual coercion and violence in federal penitentiaries found that nearly 70% of federally sentenced women reported histories of sexual abuse, 86% reported having experienced physical abuse, and 91% of federally sentenced Indigenous women reported experiencing physical and/or sexual abuse. The CSC must consider the impacts of strip searches and section 53 searches on populations with deep histories of victimization, and the many ways in which this practice is inconsistent with the principles of *Creating Choices: The report of the Task Force on federally sentenced women*.



2. Impacts of Section 53 Search on Minimum Security Population

Description: It was reported that all individuals in the minimum-security unit (MSU) were subject to strip searches by the CSC in conjunction with the section 53 search of the main compound. Individuals described strip searches as a highly harmful search practice. It was suggested by those impacted that less invasive and less traumatizing alternatives, such as access to body scanners, should be considered and made available to incarcerated populations. Individuals further reported that Detector Dog Teams have been used by the penitentiary over the course of the section 53 search to detect potential contraband in the MSU.

Individuals in the MSU also reported the cancellation of Escorted Temporary Absences and medical appointments, which they attributed to the search and reduced operational capacity. Additionally, delays in regular mail delivery were reported, contributing to feelings of anxiety and concern about potentially missing important correspondence, including legal mail and notifications from the Parole Board of Canada regarding upcoming hearing dates.

Discussion: IMT advised that strip searches in the MSU were conducted in relation to Escorted Temporary Absences (ETAs) rather than the section 53 search in the main compound. ETAs were reportedly briefly interrupted but resumed by Wednesday. IMT indicated that a triage approach to healthcare was implemented to prioritize urgent needs and minimize impacts, and stated they were not aware of any mail disruptions to the MSU but would confirm.

Law/Policy:

CCRA, section 4(c): The Service uses the least restrictive measures consistent with the protection of society, staff members and [incarcerated 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 persons, 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 appreciates IMT's responsiveness to concerns raised by the minimum-security population at FVI. CAEFS encourages CSC to apply the least restrictive measures when conducting searches and to consider the psychological impacts of search practices such as strip searching.

3. Case Management Team Engagement and Collaboration- Minimum Security Unit

Description: Individuals in minimum security reported challenges to scheduling Case Management Team (CMTs) meetings at FVI, with their institutional parole officers (IPOs), primary workers, and other supports such as behavioural interventionists and Elders. Advocates received reports that individuals feel responsible for coordinating CMT meetings, creating a barrier as most staff offices, including IPOs, are located in the main compound and require both permission and



security clearance at the principal entrance to access. CMTs facilitate cross-collaboration among penitentiary supports and provide opportunities for individuals to develop strategies and receive support in pursuing lower security classifications and conditional release. Individuals in the MSU reported that increased interaction with their IPOs and PWs could facilitate more frequent CMT meetings and better support access to conditional release and release planning. Individuals also reported inconsistent access to IPOs, noting a lack of posted office hours in the MSU and difficulty reaching them by phone. While IPO schedules were reportedly shared with the MSU in the past, this practice has been discontinued.

Advocates received further reports that 45-day reviews with PWs are not occurring as required. Individuals indicated they are not being consulted in these reviews, despite reports that PWs continue to complete 45-day reviews and upload them to the CSC's internal online network, the [Incarcerated Person] Management System.

Discussion: IMT encouraged individuals to submit written requests to schedule meetings with their IPOs and confirmed they will make IPO schedules available to individuals in the MSU. IMT also advised that individuals who transition to minimum security are generally assigned a new PWs based in the MSU, and that efforts should be made for incarcerated people to have regular access to their PWs.

Law/Policy:

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 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.

Commissioner's Directive (CD) 710-1, section 14: The Correctional Officer II/Primary Worker will meet with the [incarcerated person] and complete a Structured Casework Record as outlined in Annex B within 45 days of admission to federal custody, arrival at an institution or case reassignment, and every 45 days thereafter.

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 requirements are met on correctional planning and all decisions impacting incarcerated people.

4. Ion Scanner- Minimum Security Unit

Description: It was reported that the ion scanner at FVI's principal entrance continues to produce positive drug readings on items belonging to individuals in the MSU such as tote bags, as well as on mail received by the penitentiary. Advocates learned that when people receive a positive drug ion scan reading, they are questioned by CSC staff, and the incident is



recorded in their CSC paperwork. Individuals whose items or mail tested positive reported no drug use or known exposure to substances and described feeling fearful and uncertain about the source of the readings and the potential impact on their access to conditional release. Individuals with life sentences informed advocates that the length of their sentence results in more frequent ion scanning, increasing the likelihood of positive readings from inadvertent exposure. Individuals also reported being screened upon return from Escorted Temporary Absences and expressed anxiety about the risk of unknowingly encountering substances that could result in a positive test.

CAEFS advocates also observed an increase in positive ion scanner results for personal items and incoming mail over the past few months. It was reported during CAEFS' April advocacy that a CSC volunteer recently received a positive ion scan reading, resulting in significant emotional distress and an inability for them to enter the penitentiary.

Discussion: IMT indicated that the ion scanner is one of several tools used at FVI to screen individuals and their belongings upon entry to the penitentiary. IMT stated that the detection threshold is set at a high level, requiring prolonged exposure to substances to produce a positive reading. IMT also confirmed that positive ion scanner results are routinely followed up through engagement with the individual's CMT.

Law/Policy:

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, section 8: Everyone has the right to be secure against unreasonable search or seizure.

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

CAEFS Recommendations: The accuracy of ion scanners remains subject to ongoing concern. CSC's own research (2011) states that while Ion Mobility Spectrometry (IMS) units are relatively cost-effective, user-friendly, and provide rapid results, they are prone to false positives and may not effectively detect all forms of drugs.¹ Given the potentially significant implications of false positive results on the rights, liberties, and access to conditional release for federally incarcerated individuals, CAEFS encourages CSC to carefully consider the impacts of recording and acting on preliminary positive ion scanner results in the absence of confirmatory testing.

5. Skills Development Opportunities- Minimum Security Unit

Description: Advocates received reports that individuals in the MSU are feeling discouraged by the limited approval of structured activity proposals. Individuals expressed a desire to organize events and peer-led activities, but reported that institutional processes and operational constraints restrict opportunities for skill development and community-building. There was particular interest in formalized, CSC-supported peer skill-sharing initiatives that could provide meaningful learning experiences and enhance employment prospects upon release.

A need for increased access to technology was also identified, including training in programs such as Microsoft Excel and other offline tools relevant to administrative work. Individuals noted that many in the MSU are aging in custody and/or have

¹ Correctional Service of Canada. (2011). "Ion Scanners in Correctional Facilities: A Review of Usage and Effectiveness". <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/1200277/use-of-ion-scanners-in-correctional-facilities/1753397/>



life sentences and expressed a desire to build technological skills to support less physically demanding employment opportunities upon transition to the community.

Discussion: IMT encouraged individuals to submit activity proposals from the MSU and noted that informal skill-sharing does not require penitentiary approval. IMT also indicated openness to pilot projects introducing technology into the penitentiary, citing the current USB program at FVI as a positive example. IMT highlighted the availability of community-based technology supports upon release. IMT and CAEFS advocates discussed the potential for individuals to use ETAs to access these services in advance of day parole, to build familiarity and support reintegration.

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.

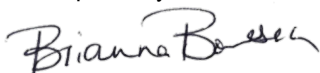
CD 700 (Correctional Interventions), section 4(3): The Institutional Head will ensure correctional policies, assessments, programs and practices respect and are responsive to:

1. gender, including the special needs of women [who are incarcerated]
2. ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences, including Indigenous [incarcerated persons]
3. [incarcerated persons] requiring mental health care and those with physical disabilities.

CAEFS Recommendations: Meaningful access to diverse and modernized vocational training is necessary for people incarcerated in Canadian federal penitentiaries to successfully reintegrate into community post-incarceration. The CSC is negatively impacting the employment potential of people in their custody and care by restricting access to technology over the course of incarceration.

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

