



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

June 23rd 2026

**Re: CAEFS Regional Advocacy Visit, May 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 May 6<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, 2026. This letter also includes a summary of the discussion that took place during the meeting on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2026, relevant laws and policies, and CAEFS' positions. Thank you, and we look forward to your response.

**Personal Property**

**Description:** CAEFS heard from several individuals experiencing challenges with obtaining personal property, also known as pen boxes. Individuals shared that because of delays in communication approval, as well as reliance on local E-Fry programs in the absence of family support, pen boxes are often arriving to Nova outside of the 30-day approval window. In certain cases, boxes arrive within the 30-day period; however, contain ill-fitting or damaged clothing due to the limited donations available to the non-profit. People's requests for extensions have been denied.

Additionally, individuals are deeply impacted by Nova's decision to impose limits of one institutionally issued mattress and one pillow per person. CAEFS heard from several individuals who have suffered injuries or undergone surgery that significantly impacts their mobility and comfort, who shared with us that they are fearful of the impact these restrictions will have on their physical health. People were also frustrated as there is no longer an avenue of medical exception available – everyone receives the same regardless of their circumstances. CAEFS raised this concern with management, noting that a significant number of people in federal custody live with traumatic brain injury or other physical disabilities.

**Discussion:** Management advised that individuals are provided with all relevant information regarding pen boxes upon arrival and indicated that delays should not occur. CAEFS clarified that delays are often associated with processing timelines for family contacts, delaying the arrangement of belongings to be sent in. Management shared further that requests for extensions are rarely denied when submitted within the original 30-day period.

Regarding mattresses and pillows, management advised that the current practice is now aligned with CSC policy, whereas previous practices were not. Management noted that four individuals at Nova are currently receiving exemptions based on documented medical needs. It was further shared that all individuals have been provided with medical-grade mattresses rather than standard-issued mattresses.

**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.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.

*CCRR s. 81(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;
- (b) provided with adequate bedding;
- (c) provided with toilet articles and all other articles necessary for personal health and cleanliness;
- (d) given the opportunity to exercise for at least one hour every day outdoors, weather permitting, or indoors where the weather does not permit exercising outdoors.

**Recommendation:** CAEFS recommends that CSC take steps to ensure communication applications are processed in a timely manner and that individuals are not disadvantaged in accessing personal property due to administrative delays beyond their control. CAEFS further recommends that CSC ensure all incarcerated individuals have access to adequate clothing, bedding, and other essential items, with accommodations that reflect individual health and disability needs.

**Access to Translation and Interpretation - Impediments to Day Parole and Following Correctional Plan**

**Description:** CAEFS received reports regarding the lack of interpretation and translation services for women whose primary language is not English or French. The absence of these supports have reportedly created significant barriers to meaningful participation in correctional planning, understanding institutional decisions and documentation, and accessing conditional release.

**Discussion:** Management committed to further investigating concerns related to the provision of translation services.

**Law and Policy:**

*CCRA s. 27(4)*: An [incarcerated person] who does not have an adequate understanding of at least one of Canada's official languages is entitled to the assistance of an interpreter

- (a) at any hearing provided for by this Part or the regulations; and
- (b) for the purposes of understanding materials provided to the [incarcerated person] pursuant to this section.

*CD 767 s. 9(a)*: ensure services and interventions are in line with paragraph 4(g) of the CCRA, specifically with respect to ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic differences, and are responsive to the needs of visible minorities and other groups, as they relate to the reintegration of ethnocultural [incarcerated people]

**Recommendation:** CAEFS recommends that CSC ensure adequate interpretation and translation supports are available to individuals who face language barriers. Individuals should not be disadvantaged in their ability to participate in correctional planning or access conditional release opportunities due to a lack of accommodation.



## Access to Family

**Description:** CAEFS heard from several individuals who felt let down and frustrated with the lack of response from the institutions' family liaison officer (FLO). Individuals shared that accessing the FLO is not an option for interim family access while awaiting visiting and correspondence (V&C) approval for communication, as previously advised by management. CAEFS received several reports that the FLO is rarely on site and shared that in multiple instances individuals have had scheduled appointments that the FLO did not attend.

Further, CAEFS received reports of continued delays in V&C processing, particularly concerning video visit applications. CAEFS heard from one individual who has been waiting 6 months for her video visitor application to be approved.

**Discussion:** Management advised that they were not previously aware of concerns related to the FLO and committed further investigation. Regarding visitation, management shared that efforts are underway to streamline the application process by approving both components of visitation simultaneously, whereas previously two separate applications were required.

### **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 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;

*CD 599 s. b:* ensure visits are available to all [incarcerated individuals]

**Recommendation:** CAEFS recommends CSC ensure the timely processing of all V&C requests to prevent unnecessary delays in access to family and community supports. Delays in communication can have significant impacts on emotional wellbeing and create barriers to managing essential personal affairs, including finances and personal belongings. More broadly, access to family is an essential component of wellness for federally sentenced women and gender diverse people. Too many federally sentenced women are fractured from their families by the conditions of incarceration, with lasting and generational adverse effects.

## Conditions of Involuntary Inter-regional Placement

**Description:** CAEFS was made aware of the involuntary inter-regional placement of two individuals from Ontario to Nova Scotia who reported that they were not informed of the transfer in advance. Both individuals shared that they had been instructed to pack their belongings while in provincial custody under the assumption that they were being transferred to Grand Valley Institution (GVI).

After travelling for an extended period and being required to sleep on the floor of a men's provincial institution overnight, the individuals realized they were not being transported to GVI, though they still had not been informed of



their destination. During the second day of transport, while stopped at a gas station, CSC staff reportedly advised the individuals that they had received a call indicating the women had not been notified of the transfer. It was at that point that staff informed them they were being transferred to Nova.

The individuals described experiencing significant emotional distress throughout the transfer process. They shared that they were crying, described the experience as feeling “like a nightmare,” and compared the experience to being kidnapped. Individuals expressed deep concern regarding the sudden and unanticipated geographic separation from their children, families, and community supports.

Since arriving at Nova, one individual reported only being able to make a single phone call to family through the chaplain, as their institutional funds had reportedly been sent to GVI as originally anticipated. One of the individuals impacted by this transfer was also impacted by the previous reported item and subsequently missed a scheduled appointment with the FLO on May 5.

**Discussion:** Management advised that responsibility for transfers in this instance rests with the provincial institution. Management further noted that these placements occur for population management purposes, indicating that GVI is currently operating over capacity. Individuals affected by these transfers were encouraged to contact staff for support, with management reassuring responsiveness to concerns raised.

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

*CCRA s. 28:* If a person is or is to be confined in a penitentiary, the Service shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that the penitentiary in which they are confined is one that provides them with the least restrictive environment for that person, taking into account

b) accessibility to

(i) the person’s home community and family,

*GL 710-2-3 s. 27:* Pursuant to section 12 of the CCRR, Annex B of these Guidelines and CD 701 - Information Sharing, the Institutional Head or designate will:

(a) meet with the [incarcerated individual] to explain the reasons for the proposed transfer

(b) provide the inmate with a copy of:

(I) the Assessment for Decision

(II) all other information that will be used in the decision-making process

(c) give the [incarcerated individual] written notice of the involuntary transfer recommendation

(d) provide the inmate two working days to respond in person or in writing to the transfer.

**Recommendation:** CAEFS recommends that CSC ensure involuntary inter-regional transfers are used only as a measure of last resort. This practice circumvents the reason that penitentiaries designated for women were regionalized and the principles of Creating Choices. Individuals subjected to this practice should be provided with timely notice, clear information, and meaningful opportunities to participate in decisions that will significantly impact their access to family, community supports, and reintegration opportunities. Where such transfers occur, CSC should take immediate steps to minimize the resulting barriers to family contact.

#### **Mother Child Program**



**Description:** CAEFS met with participants of the mother child program (MCP) during our May visit and received reports regarding access to healthcare, essential infant supplies, community supports, and continuity of program coordination.

One participant shared that her baby is due for a vaccination and has been told she would have to wait to access this on an ETA rather than at the institution. Participants also reported ongoing delays in accessing essential feeding supplies, particularly bottles, with one mother sharing that she had only one bottle available to use while waiting three weeks for additional supplies.

CAEFS also heard from participants who experienced barriers accessing Escorted Temporary Absences (ETA) related to parenting and child-focused community programs. One participant reported submitting an ETA application approximately seven months ago and believed it had been approved but was later advised that changes in management had altered the process, preventing the outing from proceeding as anticipated. Participants identified these delays and barriers as limiting access to important family and child development resources in the community.

CAEFS also learned that during a four-week absence of the MCP coordinator, participants were reportedly not provided with information regarding an alternate contact person or support.

**Discussion:** Management advised that responsibility for the health and wellbeing of infants participating in the MCP rests with the mother rather than CSC. It was noted that the institution's physician has accepted MCP children into her community practice, requiring mothers to access medical appointments through ETAs. Management further indicated that mothers are now responsible for obtaining infant supplies, such as formula and diapers, relying on institutional pay, child tax benefits where applicable, and ETAs to make purchases. Regarding concerns about accessing ETAs to attend community parenting programs, management stated that delays resulted from an incomplete application which required resubmission for approval. Management advised that in the absence of the MCP coordinator, concerns should be directed to the Manager of Programs.

#### **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 recommends that CSC take proactive steps to ensure the MCP is adequately resourced and supported, including timely access to infant supplies, healthcare, child-focused community programming, and temporary absences. Mothers participating in the program should not face unnecessary barriers in accessing services and resources that support healthy child development and the continuity of the mother-child relationship.

#### **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 116, with 1 person currently incarcerated in the Structured Intervention Unit (SIU).



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

