CAEFS
Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies

To: Rachel Parker, Kikawinaw (Institutional Head)
Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge
PO Box 1929, Maple Creek, Saskatchewan, S0N 1N0

July 20, 2026

Dear Rachel,

Thank you to you and the other members of the Institutional Management Team (IMT) at Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge (OOHL) for taking the time to meet with me via Teams on June 22, 2026.

This letter summarizes the reports from individuals incarcerated at OOHL, primarily through the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies' (CAEFS) regular virtual meetings with Peer Advocates and members of the Inmate Committee between March and June 2026. It also reflects discussions between CAEFS and the Institutional Management Team (IMT) during our meeting on June 22, 2026, outlines the relevant law and policy, and presents CAEFS' recommendations.

We appreciate your time and look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

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Jacqueline Omstead
Senior Advocate

Access to Phones

Description: CAEFS received reports that the number of women OOHL has increased to approximately 60, while the number of available phones has remained unchanged. There are reportedly currently 3 phones, all located in high-traffic areas. Individuals reported wait times of 30–45 minutes to make a call, with calls limited to 15 minutes. Women shared that these limited call duration, long wait times, and lack of privacy, create significant barriers to maintaining contact with children, family members, and other supports. Many individuals also reported increased stress because of these conditions. The placement of the phones, combined with wait times and call limits, has also reportedly contributed to interpersonal tensions among incarcerated individuals. Peer Advocates and the Inmate Welfare Committee recommended installing phones in each living unit, beginning with the largest units to help alleviate these concerns.

Discussion: The IMT noted that while the population has increased, the facility's rated capacity has remained unchanged for many years. They indicated that the number of phones was previously 2 and was increased to 3 following a review. They shared that plans to install phones in some living units are in place, though no timeline has been set. The IMT acknowledged the limitations of the current arrangement and encouraged use of the 2 available video visit terminals in the interim. Discussion also highlighted challenges associated with having all phones in a single, high-traffic location.

Law & Policy:

> *CCRA* s. 71 (1): In order to promote relationships between [incarcerated people] 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.
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> CD 085, s.15: Access to telephones, through an inmate telephone system, should be provided, on a fair and consistent basis, to help maintain family and community ties and to provide a direct link with families in the event of an emergency.
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> *CCRA* s.79.1 (1): In making decisions under this Act affecting an Indigenous [federally sentenced person], the Service shall take the following into consideration: (a) systemic and background factors affecting Indigenous peoples of Canada; (b) systemic and background factors that have contributed to the overrepresentation of Indigenous persons in the criminal justice system and that may have contributed to the [federally sentenced person's] involvement in the criminal justice system; and (c) the Indigenous culture and identity of the [federally sentenced person], including his or her family and adoption history.
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> *CCRA* s.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

CAEFS' Recommendations: CAEFS recommends that OOHL prioritize installing phones in all living units as soon as practicable. The current level of access limits the ability to maintain consistent and meaningful contact with family and community. This concern is particularly salient at OOHL, as most people who are incarcerated there are Indigenous women and where, as a healing lodge, there should be a heightened focus on mitigating the harms of family separation. Ensuring that mothers are able to maintain relationships with their children must be treated as a core priority. CAEFS remains concerned that existing access falls short of other penitentiaries designated for women and does not reflect broader community standards for basic communication.

Locked Living Units During Working Hours

Description: Individuals reported that living units are now locked during working hours and that they are required to hand in their keys at the start of the workday. Individuals shared that they needed to locate a staff member for access to the living units

during this time, with approval varying by staff member. People shared this poses a barrier to returning to their units for legitimate reasons like getting a snack or changing footwear. Overall, people shared that this new rule has contributed to creating a more restrictive environment at OOHL. It was suggested that alternative approaches, such as fair compensation, would be more effective in encouraging participation in work programs.

Discussion: The IMT explained that the measure was introduced to align with community work expectations and to address individuals leaving work early and not returning. They shared that this approach has been effective and noted that the Inmate Committee supported the decision.

Law & Policy:

> *CCRA* s. 4(c): the Service uses the least restrictive measures consistent with the protection of society, staff members and [federally sentenced people]
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> *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's] and the working conditions of staff members are safe, healthful and free of practices that undermine a person's sense of personal dignity.
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> Creating Choices, Principle 2: […] Meaningful and responsible choices can be provided only within a flexible environment which can accommodate the fluctuating and disparate needs of federally sentenced women.

CAEFS' Recommendations: CAEFS recommends that OOHL explore alternative approaches to supporting consistent and meaningful engagement in work programs that do not rely on restricting access to living units. Applying community standards to expectations around work attendance, without corresponding consideration of fairness in other areas, such as adequate compensation, does not reflect a balanced or holistic approach to preparing individuals for reintegration. Further, restricting access to living units during the day removes a level of personal agency and autonomy that is not aligned with the spirit of Creating Choices. CAEFS encourages CSC to consider approaches that promote engagement through support, fairness, and choice.

Relationships and 2SLGTQIA+ Committee

Description: CAEFS received reports that relationships between incarcerated people are treated as "against the rules" at OOHL. In one case, an individual stated they were asked to end a relationship in order to continue in a leadership role supporting a drumming program. Individuals also reported experiencing disrespectful and, at times, humiliating communication from staff regarding their relationships. People shared that they felt that they were being discriminated against based on their relationship status and sexual orientation. Additionally, individuals reported that at least three previous attempts to establish a 2SLGBTQIA+ committee were not supported. A new proposal for this committee is currently being developed.

Discussion: The IMT expressed support for establishing a 2SLGBTQIA+ Committee and disagreed with the characterization that relationships are prohibited. While relationships are permitted, the IMT noted concerns arise when they are associated with institutional charges (e.g., inter-house visiting), conflict or violence, or reduced engagement in correctional plans. The IMT indicated a preference for demonstrated stability before approving cohabitation requests and identified Behavioural Interventionists and core programming as available supports for individuals seeking to build healthy relationships.

Law & Policy:

> *CHRA* s. 3 (1): For all purposes of this Act, the prohibited grounds of discrimination are race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics, disability and conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted or in respect of which a record suspension has been ordered.
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> *CCRA* s. 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* s. 4(d): [federally sentenced 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: CAEFS is encouraged that OOHL is supportive of the establishment of a 2SLGBTQIA+ Committee at OOHL. Peer-led initiatives such as this play an important role in fostering a positive culture, promoting shared responsibility, and strengthening skills that support reintegration. In 2019, as result of a case before the Canadian Human Rights Commission, CSC distributed a memo that stated that "Correctional Service of Canada has no tolerance for discrimination with respect to inmate accommodation. Inmate requests for house/cell moves will not be declined based on sexual orientation or relationship status. All requests will be considered based on the provisions outlined in Commissioner's Directive 550 – Inmate Accommodation." CAEFS encourages CSC to abide by this commitment and to ensure transparent and consistent decision-making in regard to cohabitation requests in order to uphold the rights of 2SLGBTQIA+ people and people in relationships at OOHL.

Family Contact and Escorted Temporary Absences

Description: CAEFS received reports that family-contact Escorted Temporary Absences (ETAs) are not being facilitated in a timely manner. Individuals reported waiting months after approval for ETAs to be coordinated, resulting in missed opportunities to maintain family contact and progress toward other forms of conditional release, including day parole. Delays were attributed in part to challenges coordinating with child welfare workers, as well the absence of a "secondary" primary worker or parole officer when primary staff are unavailable. A recent staffing change in the ETA coordination role was reported to have led to some improvements.

Discussion: The IMT stated that access to family-contact ETAs is a priority and acknowledged recent improvements, though they attributed these to multiple factors rather than staffing changes alone, including child welfare staff and social worker availability, as well as the availability of bedspace for overnight stays. They indicated that ETA decisions are now up to date. The IMT encouraged the use of Private Family Visits and video visitation as interim options, while recognizing limitations. They also noted plans to hire mother-child coordinators across women's sites, who may support this work. The IMT clarified that a secondary staff member is not required, as case management teams can process applications, and encouraged individuals to hold case conferences prior to submission.

Law & Policy:

> United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child, Article 3 (1): In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration
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> *Creating Choices*: The Lodge will be premised on principles which promote […] an appreciation of the healing role of children who are closer to the spirit world.
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> *CCRA* s. 71 (1): In order to promote relationships between [incarcerated people]. 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.
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> CD 710-3 s. 6: Temporary absences may be granted for the following purposes […] (d) family contact purposes, to assist the [federally sentenced person] in maintaining and strengthening family support while in custody and as a potential community resource when released

CAEFS' Recommendations: Consistent with our recommendation regarding telephone access, this issue is particularly significant at OOHL, where most individuals are Indigenous women and where, as a healing lodge, there should be a heightened

emphasis on mitigating the harms of family separation. Ensuring that mothers are able to maintain meaningful relationships with their children must be treated as a core priority, including by recognizing the rights and best interests of the child to maintain regular and meaningful contact with their parent. CAEFS appreciates that improving access to family-contact ETAs is a shared priority with the IMT and encourages continued efforts to ensure these opportunities are facilitated in a timely and consistent manner. CAEFS recommends that CSC consider additional measures to strengthen access to families and children, including reviewing staffing models to improve coordination of ETAs, exploring the use of non-custodial overnight accommodations, providing financial support to enable family visits, and increasing the use of UTAs that include family contact, with financial support where needed.

Access to Culture and Ceremony

Description: Individuals reported a three-week period this spring during which there was no access to Elders or Traditional Healers at OOHL, reportedly due to an insurance issue. Separately, individuals also reported being told by the Indigenous Liaison Officers that only those who sit in the Inner Circle are considered for cultural ETAs, such as Sun Dance, Ghost Dance, and Horse Dance.

Discussion: The IMT confirmed the temporary absence of Elders and Traditional Healers, noting it was outside their control and that services have since resumed. They indicated that participation in cultural ETAs is guided by Nekaneet's moontime protocols but emphasized that individuals may discuss their own practices with Elders and Indigenous Liaison Officers. The IMT noted flexibility in supporting diverse practices, including medical exceptions, and emphasized the importance of communication.

Law & Policy:

> CD 702, s. 6: The Institutional Head will […] (b) ensure [incarcerated people] are provided with the services of an Elder/Spiritual Advisor, in consultation with the Regional Administrator, Indigenous Initiatives
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> *CCRA* s. 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
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> *CCRA* s. 75: An [incarcerated person] is entitled to reasonable opportunities to freely and openly participate in, and express, religion or spirituality, subject to such reasonable limits as are prescribed for protecting the security of the penitentiary or the safety of persons.

CAEFS' Recommendations: CAEFS is encouraged that access to Elders and traditional healers has been restored at OOHL; however, the reported three-week interruption raises concerns about the continuity and reliability of access to essential cultural and spiritual supports. CAEFS recommends that CSC take steps to prevent future disruptions, including addressing administrative barriers that may interfere with access, and establishing alternative avenues for cultural and ceremonial care during periods of disruption. CAEFS also encourages CSC to ensure that access to cultural ETAs is reviewed in a fair, transparent, and inclusive manner and that individuals are supported in pursuing their own cultural practices in consultation with Elders and Indigenous Liaison Officers. As suggested by OOHL, CAEFS will encourage individuals to engage with Elders to ensure their own practices are understood and meaningfully reflected in their healing plans.