



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

**Re: June 2026 Advocacy Visit Follow-Up**

July 13, 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 June 19, 2026.

This letter summarizes reports received and conditions observed by the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) during our advocacy visit on June 18 and 19, 2026. It also includes a summary of the discussion that took place during the June 19 meeting, identifies relevant laws and policies, and sets out CAEFS' recommendations.

As of June 19, the total incarcerated population at FVI was 99 people across all three security classifications, including three individuals in the Structured Intervention Unit.

### **1. Physical Conditions of Confinement: Reported Impacts of Heat in Minimum and Medium-Security Units**

**Description:** People incarcerated at FVI continue to experience the impacts of extreme heat and report that the penitentiary's current heat mitigation measures, in the absence of access to air conditioning, do not adequately meet their physical health and well-being needs. In the minimum-security unit, individuals living on the second floor reported particularly high temperatures due to heat rising through the building. Advocates were informed that one individual reportedly experienced heatstroke as a result of these conditions. In medium-security, individuals described the designated cooling rooms as difficult to access in practice despite posted availabilities. People at FVI reported being required to sit on hard plastic chairs, which poses challenges for people with chronic health conditions. Food, beverages other than water, and activities are not permitted, and access to a bathroom while using the space is limited. Advocates learned that many people incarcerated in medium security felt the restrictive environment of the cooling rooms discouraged use of the space. People in the medium-security units reported indoor temperatures reaching approximately 32°C. While fans are appreciated as one of the few cooling measures available to incarcerated people, individuals reported that fans simply circulate hot air rather than reducing the temperature inside the units.

People incarcerated in the Structured Living Environment (SLE), a unit designated for individuals with increased mental health needs, reported routinely leaving their cell doors open, including overnight, to make their cells tolerable during



periods of extreme heat. They described feeling forced to choose between their privacy and sense of safety and relief from heat-related illness.

**Discussion:** IMT informed advocates that individuals using cooling rooms may request access to a nearby bathroom from penitentiary staff, and that cards are an activity available to those using the space. Additional heat mitigation strategies identified by IMT included access to showers to reduce body temperature; written requests from living units to the Correctional Manager of Movement to open unit front doors; and the use of exterior blackout drapes to help reduce indoor temperatures.

#### **Law/Policy:**

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, section 12: Everyone has the right not to be subjected to any cruel and unusual treatment or punishment.

Corrections and Conditional Release Act (CCRA), section 3(a): The purpose of the federal correctional system is to contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by carrying out sentences imposed by courts through the safe and humane custody and supervision of [incarcerated people].

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 acknowledges that FVI has taken steps to mitigate the impacts of extreme heat on incarcerated people; however, sustained and proactive action is required to ensure that living conditions during periods of extreme heat are safe, humane, and consistent with the Correctional Service of Canada's (CSC) legislated mandate. Given that people in federal penitentiaries are disproportionately impacted by systemic inequities that contribute to higher rates of health concerns compared to the general population, CAEFS encourages CSC to consider the growing impacts of rising summer temperatures across the country, particularly in the Fraser Valley, where prolonged periods of 30°C and above are increasingly common, and assess whether the provision of air conditioning for incarcerated populations is required under multiple provisions of the CCRA.

## **2. Access to Religious Supports and Services: Sikh Chaplain**

**Description:** Advocates received reports from individuals across security classifications that access to a Sikh chaplain at FVI is being discontinued. Individuals expressed concern that the loss of this service would significantly reduce access to Sikh faith-based and spiritual supports, limiting opportunities to practice their religion and receive culturally appropriate spiritual guidance. They emphasized the importance of continued access to a Sikh chaplain and described their faith as an integral part of their healing, well-being, and reintegration journeys.

**Discussion:** IMT stated that they were not aware of any changes in access to the Sikh chaplain and indicated they would confirm with FVI's Assistant Warden of Interventions, who was unable to attend the June 19 in-person meeting.

#### **Law/Policy:**



Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, section 2(a): Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms: freedom of conscience and religion.

Canadian Human Rights Act, section 2: The purpose of this Act is to extend the laws in Canada to give effect, within the purview of matters coming within the legislative authority of Parliament, to the principle that all individuals should have an opportunity equal with other individuals to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have and to have their needs accommodated, consistent with their duties and obligations as members of society, without being hindered in or prevented from doing so by discriminatory practices based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics, disability or conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted or in respect of which a record suspension has been ordered.

CCRA, section 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 appreciates FVI's willingness to follow up on this reported concern. CAEFS encourages FVI, and all penitentiaries designated for women, to ensure ongoing, consistent, and equitable access to faith-based and spiritual supports for the women and gender-diverse people in their custody and under their supervision, in accordance with the religious and spiritual rights protected under federal legislation.

### 3. Access to Health Care

**Description:** Two individuals provided CAEFS advocates with signed consent to raise urgent health care concerns with FVI's IMT. One individual required an immediate correction to an incorrect prescription dosage that would have resulted in insufficient medication over the weekend, while the other reported deteriorating mental health and limited access to appropriate supports. More broadly, individuals across security classifications reported significant concerns about access to mental health care. People described feeling that they must reach a point of crisis or engage in self-injury before their mental health needs are recognized as sufficiently urgent to receive care. While individuals were aware of FVI's triage model and reported seeking support through established health care processes, many felt available services were neither timely nor responsive to their needs.

Advocates also heard ongoing concerns regarding CSC's National Formulary. Individuals reported being required to change effective medications upon admission to federal custody if those medications were not included on the formulary, creating additional hardship during an already difficult transition into incarceration. People also described ongoing impacts from the removal of medications such as Suboxone and the transition to Sublocade, including reports of painful injection-site reactions. In addition, individuals reported that medications, including Wellbutrin, are being removed from or discouraged for prescription due to concerns about diversion within the institution. While acknowledging institutional safety considerations, individuals expressed that these restrictions do not adequately account for their individual healthcare needs or the experiences of those who have safely and effectively used these medications over long periods.



**Discussion:** IMT shared several mental health supports for people incarcerated at FVI, including access to Behavioural Interventionists, who provide individualized mental health support. IMT also noted that community-based mental health outreach services can be requested by people at FVI and subsequently considered by the penitentiary.

#### **Law/Policy:**

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, section 7: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.

CCRA section 86(1): The Service shall provide every [incarcerated person] with (a) essential health care; and (b) reasonable access to non-essential health care.

CCRA section 86.1: When health care is provided to [incarcerated persons], the Service shall (a) support the professional autonomy and the clinical independence of registered health care professionals and their freedom to exercise, without undue influence, their professional judgment in the care and treatment of [incarcerated persons]; (b) support those registered health care professionals in their promotion, in accordance with their respective professional code of ethics, of patient-centred care and patient advocacy; and (c) promote decision-making that is based on the appropriate medical care, dental care and mental health care criteria.

**CAEFS Recommendations:** CAEFS urges CSC to implement clear, standardized processes to ensure informed consent and continuity of prescribed medications and to improve coordination with external health care providers. CAEFS further recommends enhanced access to medication counselling. In order to ensure true professional autonomy in the treatment of incarcerated people and ensure that they are provided with their right to essential health care, the National Formulary must be amended to reflect clinical best practices, rather than prioritize security-based restrictions.

#### **4. Access to Personal Items and Clothing**

**Description:** Both peer-led committees and individuals reported ongoing concerns about access to personal belongings and clothing throughout their incarceration at FVI. People with long-term and life sentences reported a need for greater access to personal items, including clothing, hygiene products, and basic electronics, to better reflect the length of their incarceration. Individuals reported that the conditions of confinement can contribute to significant bodily changes, including weight loss and weight gain, and that requests for replacement clothing to accommodate these changes are rarely approved as exceptions by the Warden. As a result, some people are left wearing clothing that no longer fits or meets their current needs. Individuals also shared that many people with life sentences rely primarily on institution-issued clothing, which they described as negatively affecting their self-esteem, sense of dignity, and confidence as they prepare for eventual reintegration into the community.

Advocates also heard concerns about the 30-day timeframe for receiving a penitentiary pack – a package of approved clothing and personal items sent from the community following admission to the penitentiary. Individuals reported that 30 days is often insufficient, creating additional stress during the transition into federal custody. As a result, requests to the Warden for extensions beyond the 30-day period were described as a frequent occurrence.



**Discussion:** IMT and CAEFS advocates did not have time during the IMT meeting to discuss this reported concern. IMT said they will address access to personal items and clothing as a reported concern in their response to CAEFS' June systemic advocacy letter.

#### **Law/Policy:**

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 people, 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.

Corrections and Conditional Release Regulations (CCRR), section 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; (b) provided with adequate bedding; (c) provided with toilet articles and all other articles necessary for personal health and cleanliness.

**CAEFS Recommendations:** CAEFS encourages the CSC to examine the impacts of policies such as CD 566-12 on individuals experiencing long-term incarceration and to amend CSC policies and practices to better reflect the lived realities of federally incarcerated people. CAEFS further encourages CSC to consider the impacts of long-term incarceration on the physical, emotional, and psychological health and well-being of those in its care and custody, and to explore alternatives to continued incarceration that mitigate these harms and support CSC's reintegration mandate.

### **5. Impacts of Security Intelligence Officer Information on Security Level Reviews**

**Description:** Individuals reported that information received and relied upon by the Security Intelligence Officer (SIO) during security level reviews is contributing to higher security classifications and more restrictive placements, even where the information is believed to be unverified or inaccurate. Individuals, particularly those transferred to maximum security or the Structured Intervention Unit (SIU), reported that they were not given an opportunity to meet with the SIO to respond to or clarify allegations before being transferred and interim placed at a higher security classification. Instead, they described transfers to more restrictive environments as the initial response, rather than efforts to resolve concerns through dialogue or informal resolution. Individuals also reported that there are few effective mechanisms to challenge SIO information once it has been documented. They reported that security level review decisions, including transfers to the SIU, often appear to rely on allegations rather than verified facts, limiting their ability to meaningfully respond to information that may significantly affect their conditions of confinement. The reported impacts of being placed at a higher security classification are significant, including reduced access to correctional programming, fewer opportunities for engagement with outside community organizations, and potential delays to conditional release that may extend the length of incarceration.

**Discussion:** IMT and CAEFS advocates did not have time during the IMT meeting to discuss this reported concern. IMT said they will address impacts of security intelligence officer information as a reported concern in their response to CAEFS' June systemic advocacy letter.



**Law/Policy:**

CCRA, section 4(c): The Service uses the least restrictive measures consistent with the protection of society, staff members and [people who are incarcerated].

CCRA, section 4(f): Correctional decisions are made in a forthright and fair manner, with access by the [incarcerated person] to an effective grievance procedure.

CCRA, section 30(2): The Service shall give each [person] reasons, in writing, for assigning a particular security classification or for changing that classification.

**CAEFS Recommendations:** CSC must take all reasonable steps to manage perceived risk in the least restrictive manner. CAEFS encourages FVI to respond to alleged intelligence in ways that prioritize the least restrictive measures, reflect the principles of Creating Choices, and ensure that individuals' rights to due process - a right maintained during incarceration - is not violated.

Thank you for taking the time to review this letter and for your continued efforts to improve 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, policy, and the principles of Creating Choices.

Respectfully,

*Brianna Bourassa*

Brianna Bourassa, Lead Advocate, Pacific Regional Advocacy Team, CAEFS

