



To: Angela Beecher, Warden
Grand Valley Institution for Women
1575 Homer Watson Blvd, Kitchener, ON, N2P 2C5

September 1, 2026

CAEFS' July 2026 Advocacy Letter

Dear Angela,

We want to thank members of the institutional management team (IMT) at GVI for taking the time to meet with our advocacy team on July 29.

This letter summarizes reports we received and conditions we observed during our visit to the Grand Valley Institution on July 27 and 28, as well as summaries of the discussion between the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) and members of the IMT following the visit, the relevant laws and policies, and CAEFS' recommendations.

We look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

Tise Ogunleye
Lead Advocate



Access to Supports for the Elderly and very Ill

Description: People reported to the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) that there is an increasing number of elderly and seriously ill individuals at Grand Valley Institution (GVI) and expressed concern that some of these individuals may not be able to advocate for themselves when their needs are not being met. As a result, people were concerned that individuals who are particularly vulnerable due to age, illness, or declining abilities may not always be receiving the care and support they require.

People provided examples of individuals with whom they live who, in their view, are not receiving adequate care or assistance. Some also expressed concern that certain individuals may be better suited to living in the health care house or Structured Living Environment (SLE) based on their health and functional needs. People reported that they have raised these concerns verbally with staff and have also submitted requests regarding individuals they believe require additional support. People further expressed concern about the reliance on peer personal support worker (PSW) to support individuals with significant health needs they suggested that increasing the availability of certified personal PSW's and nursing staff could help ensure that individuals with more complex or significant needs receive appropriate and consistent care.

In response to these concerns, the Inmate Committee, Peer Advocates, and House Representatives indicated that they intend to bring forward a proposal for a committee focused specifically on the needs and interests of elderly individuals at GVI. The Inmate Committees, Peer Advocates, and House Representatives also raised broader concerns about individuals who are elderly or seriously ill and may potentially die while in custody. They expressed concern about whether adequate plans and supports are in place to ensure that individuals are able to die with dignity, including access to appropriate end-of-life care, life-support decision-making, and spiritual or cultural care where requested.

Discussion: The Institutional Management Team (IMT) acknowledged the concerns raised and shared that, over the past several years, specialized training has been provided to staff who work with seniors. The IMT explained that staff provide additional assistance to individuals who require it; however, they noted that some elderly individuals decline additional support. The IMT also indicated that they are open to the establishment of a seniors committee. They further shared before elderly or ill individual arrives at GVI, they provide appropriate care to the best of their ability.

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

CAEFS' Recommendations: CAEFS is encouraged that the IMT is open to having a committee dedicated to the needs of seniors and provides training for staff who work with seniors. Aging in penitentiary is a particularly frightening experience for many individuals in your care and custody, and dedicated attention to their needs is essential to strive for a dignity preserving environment. CAEFS recommends that GVI develop a more proactive and individualized approach to identifying and supporting elderly and seriously ill individuals, particularly those who may have difficulty advocating for their own needs.



Physical Living Conditions: Extreme Heat

Description: People continue to report extreme heat conditions across the living units and security classifications at GVI, with reported indoor temperatures frequently reaching between 35°C and 42°C. People expressed concern that these conditions are not only uncomfortable but are creating significant health and safety risks, particularly for individuals with pre-existing health conditions that may be aggravated by extreme heat. CAEFS was informed that individuals with COPD, seizure disorders, and cardiac and respiratory conditions have experienced worsening symptoms during periods of extreme heat and have tried to access personal air conditioning but were not supported. In addition, people shared that other attempts to mitigate the heat such as leaving their cell doors open or sleeping in less clothing are not permitted and often carry the risk of getting a charge.

Additionally, people reported some positive developments regarding efforts to reduce the impact of the heat, such as the installation of blackout curtains, which they reported have helped reduce heat and sunlight entering some living units. People shared concerns that blackout curtains may not be installed on all windows and people in the MSU further reported that the main compound was being prioritized for the installation of blackout curtains.

Discussion: The IMT shared that they are empathetic to the situation but are governed by policy in what they can do and are following the regional heat protocol and are checking and monitoring the heat. They shared that blackout curtains on the main compound are being prioritized due to higher volume of people and where blackout curtains cannot be installed, they are looking into additional liners to reinforce and support cooling. They also shared that they have provided cooling stations to people.

Law & 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 people] 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. 83(1): the Service shall, to ensure a safe and healthful penitentiary environment, ensure that all applicable federal health, safety, sanitation and fire laws are complied with in each penitentiary and that every penitentiary is inspected regularly by the persons responsible for enforcing those laws.

CAEFS' Recommendations: Given the frequency of extreme weather, we urge CSC to implement a high/extreme heat protocol that meets the health and well-being needs of the incarcerated population, created in collaboration with appropriate public health authorities and incarcerated individuals and be aligned with the CCRA and CCRR. Unlike in the community, incarcerated people cannot leave this extremely hot environment, and the temperature people are subjected to poses significant health and safety risks.

Access to Nutritious Food and Adequate Food Amounts

Description: People in the maximum-security unit continue to raise concerns about the overall quality and nutritional value of the food provided with concerns including vegetables being waterlogged, salads containing excessive amounts of oil, and lettuce being described as 'gritty and disintegrating'. People expressed that the quality of the meals can make them difficult to eat, and there are serious concerns that protein levels fall well below what individuals need.



As a result, people reported that they are increasingly relying on food purchased from the canteen to supplement their meals. They noted that many of the available options are poor quality, high in sugar or salt which creates an additional financial burden and adverse health consequences for individuals who must spend their own money to supplement institutional meals but may also negatively affect their overall nutrition and wellness.

Discussion: The IMT shared that they will provide the feedback about the meals served in the maximum-security unit to food services but the dietician at regional sets the menu and they cannot deviate from it.

Law & Policy:

CCRR s. 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;**

CCRA s.70: The Service shall take all reasonable steps 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: Incarcerated people have the right to live in an environment that is safe, healthful, and free of practices that undermine a person's sense of personal dignity. This includes adequate food quality as this a basic need. Incarceration in Canada causes significant accelerated aging, and lack of access to nutritious food forms a foundational cause of this tragic consequence. Longterm incarceration in Canada has been found to reduce lifespan by 20 years from the general public, causing permanent loss to federally sentenced people that is not contemplated in the law. CAEFS encourages GVI and the CSC broadly to address and be responsive to issues that concern the safety, health and overall well-being of people.

Access to Vocational Training

Description: In conversations with both people and staff, CAEFS heard consistent concerns about the limited availability of vocational training opportunities that leads to meaningful and sustainable employment following release. People emphasized that access to relevant vocational training is an important component of successful reintegration, particularly when programs provide skills that are in demand in the community. People also compared the opportunities available at GVI, with the broader range of vocational programming offered at federal institutions for men and expressed concern about the disparity in access to training.

The horticulture program was identified as a particularly valuable program by people at GVI. People described horticulture as providing transferable skills that can lead to viable employment opportunities in areas such as landscaping, which can offer meaningful and relatively well-paid work in the community. People therefore expressed concern about reports that the horticulture program may be discontinued.

Discussion: The IMT shared that the work release coordinator will find gaps and target organizations that might be available.. Additionally, the IMT noted that they are offering first aid, WHIMIS, power tools and other employment ready programs.

Law & Policy:

CCRA s. 4(c.2) the Service ensures the effective delivery of programs to [federally sentenced 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 s. 3: The purpose of the federal correctional system is to contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by (b) 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.

CAEFS' Recommendations: CAEFS recommends that CSC increase opportunities for meaningful employment and programming both within the penitentiary and through conditional release processes, such as work releases. programming, employment, and recreational activities are all key components of successful integration and are especially important for individuals in the women and gender diverse sector, given the Creating choices model.

Continuity of the Case Management Team

Description: CAEFS received reports that individuals are experiencing changes to their Case Management Teams (CMT) without being notified and the lack of communication regarding these changes is creating confusion over who is responsible for addressing their requests. These gaps in communication and continuity have resulted in delays in addressing requests and moving forward with their correctional plan.

People suggested that they should receive written notification whenever there is a change to their case management team, like the documentation provided upon admission that identifies their assigned CMT. They also suggested that an introductory meeting or phone call with new CMT members would help establish rapport and provide continuity and making sure peoples concerns are being addressed.

Discussion: The IMT shared that this was raised with Inmate Committee and are in agreement that written notification should be provided.

Law & Policy:

CCRA s.4 (b): the Service enhances its effectiveness and openness through the timely exchange of relevant information with victims, offenders and other components of the criminal justice system and through communication about its correctional policies and programs to victims, offenders and the public;

CCRA 4 (f): correctional decisions are made in a forthright and fair manner, with access by the [federally sentenced person] to an effective grievance procedure;

CCRA s.15 (2): The plan is to be maintained in consultation with the offender 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.

CAEFS' Recommendations: CAEFS is encouraged that the IMT plans to address this issue. People rely on their CMTs to support them in progressing with their correctional plans, accessing programs and interventions, preparing for release, and helping with accessing meaningful resources. CAEFS recommends that GVI prioritize timely notifications of changes to CMT's as they play vital role in an individual's time at GVI.



Access to Health care

Description: People in the minimum-security unit (MSU) reported ongoing concerns regarding the management and administration of their prescriptions and medications. These concerns included prescriptions being lost, resulting in delays in accessing necessary medications, including medications for heart and thyroid conditions. People also reported instances where they were provided with another person's medication in error, raising concerns about medication safety and the potential consequences of such errors. People expressed that these experiences have contributed to a perception that their health and well-being are not being treated as a priority.

CAEFS received positive feedback from people on the main compound regarding the new dentist and shared feeling that their dental needs are being addressed. However, in the MSU, people reported waiting to see the dentist for longstanding issues that they consider urgent, such as broken and painful teeth.

Discussion: The IMT shared that they will continue to follow up with urgent dental issues. They shared that medication processes with their regional pharmacy have changed and they are working with the regional and local pharmacies to reduce any gaps in medication packaging. They also shared that they are not aware of inconsistencies with medication line times but will investigate this further.

Law & Policy:

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. 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

CCRR s. 83(1): the Service shall, to ensure a safe and healthful penitentiary environment, ensure that all applicable federal health, safety, sanitation and fire laws are complied with in each penitentiary and that every penitentiary is inspected regularly by the persons responsible for enforcing those laws

CAEFS' Recommendations: Federally sentenced women and gender diverse people are reliant on penitentiary staff and contractors to provide health services, medications, referrals, emergency care and access to dental care. CAEFS urges CSC to adopt additional measures to protect the dignity and well-being of those in its care. Access to appropriate, trauma-informed health care is essential, not only to meet community standards but also to support meaningful engagement in correctional plans and successful reintegration.

