



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

Sept 15, 2026

Re: CAEFS Regional Advocacy Visit, August 2026

Dear Tysha,

We want to thank the Institutional Management Team at Nova Institution for Women (Nova) for taking the time to meet with our Atlantic Regional Advocacy Team on August 27, 2026.

This letter summarizes reports received and conditions observed by the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) during our advocacy visits on August 5, 18, and 19. It also includes a summary of the discussion that took place during the August 27 meeting, identifies relevant laws and policies, and sets out CAEFS' recommendations.

Thank you, and we look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

Shelby Thompson
Lead Advocate, Atlantic Regional Advocacy Team, CAEFS

Classification of Grievances and Access to Escalation Mechanisms



Description: CAEFS received reports that individuals are experiencing barriers with the grievance process. People shared specifically that grievances, from those involving healthcare, to accessibility needs, and incidents of witnessing the use of force by CSC staff, were returned as complaints rather than received at the appropriate level, despite their urgent and serious nature.

Individuals reported that these downgraded complaints often resulted in unsatisfactory resolutions. In one case involving witnessed use of force described as brutality, an individual was informed that they could not use the grievance process to report their concern altogether, and no further action was taken in response to the report.

Discussion: Management advised that grievances are assessed against established criteria and may be downgraded to complaints. They stated that individuals who are dissatisfied with a complaint response may continue through the grievance process. Management also clarified that grievances are intended to address issues that directly impact the person submitting them.

Law and Policy:

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. 90: There shall be a procedure for fairly and expeditiously resolving [incarcerated persons'] grievances on matters within the jurisdiction of the Commissioner, and the procedure shall operate in accordance with the regulations made under paragraph 96(u).

CD 081-1 s.2: Some grievances must be automatically initiated at higher levels than the complaint level, such as:

- (a) allegations of harassment, sexual harassment or discrimination - initial grievance
- (b) decisions or actions of the Institutional Head/District Director - final grievance
Note: Grievances containing allegations of harassment, sexual harassment or discrimination against the Institutional Head/District Director must be addressed in a final grievance.
- (c) submissions regarding institutional transfers - final grievance
- (d) submissions concerning an appeal of a decision rendered on a claim against the Crown - final grievance
- (e) submissions regarding reviewsthe decision to transfer an inmate to a Structured Intervention Unit - final grievance
- (f) submissions concerning transfers to/from the Special Handling Unit - final grievance
- (g) submissions concerning a placement in a dry cell - final grievance.

CD 081-1 s. 56: Any grievance related to a reported use of force incident, or the use of force review process, will be registered as a final grievance. If the incident grieved has not been recorded in OMSR as a confirmed use of force, the submission must be registered at the lowest possible level.

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that CSC ensure the grievance process is fair, accessible, and responsive to the concerns of incarcerated individuals, and that grievances meeting the criteria for escalation are reviewed at the appropriate level. Given the limited avenues available to incarcerated people to report concerns,



CSC should take particular care to ensure that allegations involving staff misconduct, use of force, healthcare, accessibility, and human rights concerns are not dismissed or overlooked on procedural grounds.

Physical Conditions of Confinement – Conditions of Living Units

Description: CAEFS received reports of ongoing concerns related to the physical living conditions at Nova. Individuals in both the medium and minimum security populations, including participants in the Mother Child Program (MCP), reported insect infestations within living units, including insects in the walls. People described being bitten and experiencing pain, discomfort, and welts because of these infestations. Many individuals attributed the problem to damaged and deteriorating window screens that have not been repaired or replaced.

CAEFS also received reports that some living unit windows are broken, and that this has resulted in injury. In addition, people reported hornet infestations throughout the institution, including in housing units, near the medication line, and across institutional grounds. Individuals described experiencing pain and allergic reactions and reported that the infestations have at times prevented people employed as maintenance staff from completing their work.

Discussion: Management shared that efforts to address hornet infestations have been undertaken, although they acknowledged delays in the extermination process. Management encouraged individuals experiencing issues related to hornets or insect infestations to report concerns to Institutional Services and to seek medical attention through Health Services where treatment is required. Management also advised that they intend to meet monthly with the Inmate Committee (IC) Chair to address maintenance-related concerns and assured that the recent appointment of a new maintenance supervisor will support the timely resolution of maintenance issues.

Law and Policy:

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

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.

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that CSC take timely and proactive measures to ensure that all areas of the institution, including living units, remain safe, healthful, and free from environmental hazards. Reports of insect infestations, damaged infrastructure, and other maintenance concerns should be addressed promptly to prevent harm to incarcerated individuals and participants in the Mother Child Program. CSC should also ensure that delays related to administrative processes or institutional capacity do not impede the timely resolution of issues that affect the health, safety, and dignity of those living within the institution.

Physical Conditions of Confinement – Extreme Heat

Description: CAEFS heard from many individuals who have been impacted by conditions of extreme heat within the institution. People shared that prolonged exposure to extreme heat, coupled with limited access to relief



measures, has had a significant impact on their physical and mental wellbeing. Individuals reported symptoms including dizziness, dehydration, loss of appetite, and sleep deprivation. People also described being unable to exercise regularly or safely due to the heat, negatively affecting their overall health and wellness. It was further reported that several individuals experienced heat stroke.

Individuals reported that relief measures remain inadequate, noting that the cooling station has only been made available on one occasion. People shared that each living unit is intended to have access to two fans; however, some units reportedly have only one. Individuals also requested an update regarding the installation of heat-mitigation blinds that were discussed following the Inmate Committee (IC) meeting in May.

Discussion: Management referred to their response to this issue in CAEFS' June Advocacy Letter and indicated that they had no further information to add. Management advised that steps are being taken to install heat-mitigation curtains in the living units as part of ongoing efforts to address the impacts of extreme heat.

Law and Policy:

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

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.

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that Nova align its practices with the extreme heat temperature thresholds set out by Environment and Climate Change Canada, which identify 29 degrees as the threshold for extreme heat in Nova Scotia.¹ CAEFS encourages Nova to implement air conditioning to ensure people are safe. People in federal penitentiaries are disproportionately impacted by systemic inequities and chronic deteriorating health during incarceration that contribute to a drastically lower life expectancy compared to the general population, and this should be factored within CSC health and safety analyses.

Double Bunking

Description: CAEFS continues to receive reports of prolonged double bunking. Individuals reiterated concerns about the ongoing impacts of these conditions on their mental health, sense of dignity, privacy, and overall wellbeing. People described that they felt strain from sharing a small limited living space for extended periods, feeling insecurity, heightened stress, reduced personal autonomy, and challenges maintaining a sense of safety and comfort within their living environment. Individuals also reported that limited refrigerator space continues to negatively affect nutrition and food security, restricting their ability to properly store food and maintain adequate access to healthy dietary options, adding to additional issues with access to food and nutrition.

¹ Environment and Climate Canada, Extreme Heat Events: Canadian Environmental Sustainability Indicators (2025), Annex C, Table C.1
Extreme Heat Temperature Thresholds: Daytime Maximum Temperature: 29 Degrees Celsius.



Discussion: Management indicated that they had no further information to add regarding this issue. They advised that individuals are removed from double-bunking situations, when possible, but that the current circumstances of the institution continue to necessitate double bunking.

Law and Policy:

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.

CD 550 s. 7: Population management strategies must include single occupancy when feasible and ensure that double bunking remains a temporary accommodation measure.

Recommendation: Double bunking has known and well documented adverse impacts and should be avoided in federal penitentiaries. CAEFS recommends that CSC prioritize reintegration efforts, and explore all possible alternatives to custody, lowering the amount of federally incarcerated women and gender-diverse people. We recommend that, when double bunking is necessary, CSC assesses individual compatibility, as well as physical and psychological health needs. This approach supports dignity, safety, and respectful living conditions.

Accessibility Accommodations

Description: CAEFS received reports that accessible transportation and support was neither consistent nor reliable for people who require wheelchairs. Individuals shared that they have missed critical healthcare appointments due to inadequate transportation, resulting in significant delays in accessing necessary medical care.

When transportation is available, wheelchair users reported experiencing substantial barriers during the transfer process. One individual described having to transfer herself into a vehicle and remain on the floor for the duration of the trip to a previous medical appointment. She reported that CSC staff were unable to provide physical assistance, and that Emergency Health Services (EHS) was required to transfer her from the CSC vehicle back into a wheelchair upon arrival. People with disabilities expressed serious concerns regarding their safety, dignity, and equitable access to healthcare, as well as frustration with delays and inadequate accommodations.

Discussion: Management advised that Nova has an accessible vehicle for transporting wheelchair users; however, it is not equipped to accommodate bariatric wheelchairs. They shared that transportation for individuals requiring additional accommodation has been outsourced to Colchester Transportation Cooperative Limited (CTCL). Management indicated that they were unaware of the reported incident involving an individual travelling on the floor of a vehicle and expressed concern upon learning of the report. Management also advised that the individual who previously missed a medical appointment due to transportation issues was successfully transported to and attended a subsequent appointment earlier this week.

Law and Policy:

Canadian Human Rights Act s. 5: 5 It is a discriminatory practice in the provision of goods, services, facilities or accommodation customarily available to the general public

- (a) to deny, or to deny access to, any such good, service, facility or accommodation to any individual, or
- (b) to differentiate adversely in relation to any individual, on a prohibited ground of discrimination.

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. 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.

Recommendation: CAEFS appreciates management's attention to this matter and the steps taken to facilitate accessible transportation for individuals requiring accommodation. CAEFS recommends that CSC ensure that accessible transportation and transfer supports are consistently available to all individuals with mobility-related disabilities, including those who require specialized accommodations. No person should experience delays in accessing healthcare, or have their safety, dignity, or independence compromised, due to inaccessible transportation. Given the limited ability of incarcerated people to access alternative transportation or community-based supports, CSC bears a heightened responsibility to ensure that accessibility needs are met in a timely, reliable, and dignified manner.

Indigenous Supports and Programs

Description: CAEFS received reports from individuals who feel that the availability of Indigenous supports and programs at Nova is inadequate. Individuals shared that they are transferred to Nova from very far distances, and that they have limited opportunities to engage with their Indigenous culture and access culturally relevant supports while at Nova. People reported that Indigenous programming and support appear to be more readily available within the maximum-security unit, while those in other areas of the institution feel they must actively seek out access to these services. One individual reported that, despite being incarcerated at Nova for two years, she had met with the Elder on only one occasion. Individuals expressed concerns that inadequate access to Indigenous supports and programming has limited their opportunities to engage with their Indigenous culture and receive culturally relevant support.

Discussion: Management acknowledged that the Indigenous population has seen growth – making up approximately one third of the institution. Management advised that Nova currently employs two Indigenous Liaison Officers (ILOs) and one Elder. They noted that there is a vacant position for a second Elder, which has not yet been filled. Management emphasized the importance of utilizing established processes, such as submitting requests, to



access Indigenous supports and services. They also clarified that participation in Indigenous programming is voluntary and that individuals must choose to engage with these programs. Management indicated that the Indigenous support team is actively engaged and encouraged individuals with concerns to bring them forward to the Acting Warden of Interventions (AWI).

Law and 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 persons, visible minorities, persons requiring mental health care and other groups.

CCRA s.80: Without limiting the generality of section 76, the Service shall provide programs designed particularly to address the needs of Indigenous [incarcerated persons].

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that CSC ensure Indigenous supports and programming are accessible, available, and responsive to the needs of Indigenous individuals across all areas of the institution. Given the continued reliance by CSC on involuntary transfers of women and gender diverse people from being close to their home communities, CAEFS further recommends that CSC prioritize increasing Indigenous support capacity to ensure that access to culturally relevant services is timely, equitable, and consistent with its legislative obligations toward Indigenous peoples.

Access to Conditional Release

Description: CAEFS received reports that many people are experiencing delays in accessing conditional release. Individuals shared that programs required for the completion of their correctional plans are frequently delayed, resulting in postponed parole applications pending program completion. People also reported that delays in administrative reports and reviews, including Offender Security Level (OSL), have further delayed access to parole.

Individuals expressed frustration with these circumstances, noting that they are actively engaging in their correctional plans, yet continue to encounter administrative and procedural barriers to release. People reported that these delays have prolonged their incarceration and impacted their ability to pursue timely reintegration into their communities and support networks.

Discussion: Management shared that delays in conditional release can involve a variety of factors, and they would require individual cases to comment further. They shared that, for the first time, Nova is experiencing waitlists for programming due to population growth. Management acknowledged that staffing turnover has contributed to some delays and advised that two additional program officers are currently being onboarded. They further indicated that postponement applications are reviewed on a case-by-case basis and encouraged individuals seeking support or clarification regarding their progress toward release to raise their concerns directly with management.

Law and Policy:

CCRA s. 3(b): assisting the rehabilitation of [incarcerated persons] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community.



CCRA s. 100: The purpose of conditional release is to contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by means of decisions on the timing and conditions of release that will best facilitate the rehabilitation of [incarcerated persons] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens.

CD s. 700 (5): parole officers will facilitate the reintegration of [incarcerated people] into community at the earliest possible date while ensuring public and staff safety in all case management decisions.

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that CSC support access to conditional release at the earliest possible opportunity by reducing administrative and program delays that prevent parole. Federally sentenced women and gender diverse people achieve the best outcomes when supported in the community with access to family, cultural connections, and community-based resources, and should not face unnecessary barriers to conditional release.

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 127.

¹ Environment and Climate Canada, Extreme Heat Events: Canadian Environmental Sustainability Indicators (2025), Annex C, Table C.1 Extreme Heat Temperature Thresholds:



Annex C. Extreme heat temperature thresholds

Table C.1. The extreme heat temperature thresholds used to develop the indicator

Region	Daytime maximum temperature (°C)	Nighttime minimum temperature (°C)
Newfoundland and Labrador, and Quebec (including Gaspé, Kuujjuarapik, Tasiujaq, and Kuujuaq)	28	16
Nova Scotia	29	16
Prince Edward Island	28	18
New Brunswick and southern Quebec (including Quebec City, Lake Saint-Jean, Maurice, Waskaganish, and Rivière-du-Loup)	30	18
Extreme southern Quebec (including Greater Montreal, Gatineau, and the Eastern Townships)	32	20
North shore and northern coastal Quebec (including Puvirnituq, Kangirsuk, and Kangiqsualujuaq)	26	12
Extreme southern Ontario (Essex and Chatham-Kent Counties)	31	21
Southern Ontario (including the District of Parry Sound)	31	20
Northern Ontario	29	18
Southern Prairies (Southern Manitoba, Southern Saskatchewan, and Extreme Southern Alberta – including Pincher Creek, Cardston, Lethbridge, and Medicine Hat)	32	16
Northern Manitoba	29	16
Northern Saskatchewan (including Meadow Lake, The Battlefords, Prince Albert, and Hudson Bay), northern Alberta (the remainder of Alberta - including the Cities of Edmonton, Red Deer and Calgary), northeastern British Columbia (Northern Interior and Central Interior - including Chilcotin, Cariboo, Prince George, North Thompson, and North Columbia, BC Peace, Bulkley Valley and the Lakes and Fort Nelson), and southern Northwest Territories (Mackenzie River and Great Slave Lake communities)	29	14
Southeastern British Columbia (Southern interior - including South Thompson and Okanagan, Kootenays, and Columbias – south)	35	18
Southwestern inland British Columbia (Eastern Metro Vancouver including Coquitlam and Surrey, and the Fraser Valley)	33	17
Southwestern British Columbia (Western Metro Vancouver - including the North Shore, City of Vancouver and Richmond, Howe Sound, Whistler, Sunshine Coast, Vancouver Island - except northern sections)	29	16
Northwestern British Columbia (Central and Northern Coast - inland and coastal regions, Northern Vancouver Island, and northwestern BC) and Yukon	28	13
Southern Nunavut (Southern Kivalliq region – including Kugluktuk) and northern Northwest Territories (Mainland Inuvialuit Settlement Region – including Tutoyaktuk and Paulatuk)	26	n/a ^(A)

