



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

**Re: July & August 2026 Advocacy Visit Follow-Up**

October 7, 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 August 21, 2026.

This letter summarizes reports received and conditions observed by the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) during our advocacy visits on July 23, and August 20 and 21, 2026. This letter combines reports from our July and August advocacy visits, as the July visit was reduced to a single day due to the illness of the Lead Advocate. It also includes a summary of the discussion that took place during the August 21, 2026, meeting, identifies relevant laws and policies, and sets out CAEFS' recommendations.

On July 23, 2026, the total incarcerated population at FVI was 105 people across all three security classifications, including two individuals in the Structured Intervention Unit (SIU).

On August 21, 2026, the total incarcerated population at FVI was 107 people across all three security classifications, including one individual in the SIU.

**July Advocacy Visit**

**1. Use of Pinel Restraints**

**Description:** Advocates received reports from the population that the Pinel Restraint System, a variable-point restraint device used to restrict body movement<sup>1</sup>, was being applied continuously, 24 hours a day, for consecutive days and reportedly for up to two weeks, on an individual incarcerated in FVI's maximum-security unit.

Individuals expressed serious concerns about the person's wellbeing, including access to trauma-informed healthcare and the physical and psychological impacts of prolonged restraint use. Advocates were asked to connect with the individual to

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<sup>1</sup> Commissioner's Directive 843: Interventions to preserve life and prevent serious bodily harm, Definitions.



better understand their identified needs and to support advocacy efforts aimed at ensuring access to appropriate healthcare and care planning.

**Discussion:** Shortly after the July 23 visit, the individual was transferred out of the Pacific Region. As the transfer occurred before signed consent could be obtained, the Lead Advocate was unable to connect with them directly. CAEFS continues our efforts to locate the individual and determine whether advocacy support is requested.

**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 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 appreciates the willingness of FVI's institutional management team, particularly the Correctional Manager of the maximum-security unit, to facilitate connections between the CAEFS Pacific Regional Advocacy Team, including the Lead Advocate and Peer Advocates, and individuals with identified or suspected advocacy needs. CAEFS encourages Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) to prioritize alternatives to incarceration in federal penitentiaries for individuals with complex healthcare needs, to uphold their legislated rights to safe and humane treatment and patient-centered care.

## **2. Use of Medical Observation Unit**

**Description:** Advocates received reports of individuals in the maximum-security unit being placed in medical observation units despite requesting alternative accommodations to address their healthcare needs. It was reported that segregative practices, including placement in medical observation, can negatively impact mental health, diminish personal autonomy, and limit access to trauma-informed, person-centered care. Individuals reported that placement in the medical observation unit feels punitive and inconsistent with their identified need for collaborative mental health support and treatment planning.

**Discussion:** IMT and CAEFS advocates did not have time during the IMT meeting to discuss this reported concern. IMT said they will address this reported concern in their response to CAEFS' July and August 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 [incarcerated people].



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 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-centered 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 encourages the CSC to consider the profound impacts of segregative practices, including medical observation, on the mental and physical health and wellbeing of incarcerated people. Considering CSC's unique responsibility to provide safe and humane custody to people in federal penitentiaries, and wherein those same people are reliant on penitentiary staff and contractors to provide health services, referrals, emergency care, timeframes etc., CAEFS urges CSC to adopt additional measures to protect the dignity and wellbeing 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.

### **3. Physical Conditions of Confinement: Reported Impacts of Heat-Related Illnesses**

**Description:** People in medium-security at FVI reported experiencing heat-related illnesses in July due to increased summer temperatures. Advocates also learned that the medium-security population cannot access the bathroom in the same building as FVI's cooling room, which was made available to people in medium-security as part of the institution's heat-mitigation strategy. Individuals reported that, if they need to use the bathroom while using the cooling room, they must leave the building and return to their living units. It was reported that requiring individuals to leave the building to use the bathroom while attempting to regulate their body temperature is inconsistent with the intended purpose of providing a cooling room. The lack of accessible bathrooms presents additional challenges for people with mobility limitations and/or chronic health conditions.

Advocates also learned that people experience extreme heat while being transported in CSC vehicles during temporary absences from the penitentiary. One individual reported becoming extremely ill due to the high temperature inside a vehicle while being transported on a medical escorted temporary absence.

**Discussion:** IMT and CAEFS advocates did not have time during the IMT meeting to discuss this reported concern. IMT said they will address this reported concern in their response to CAEFS' July and August systemic advocacy letter.

#### **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.



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 CSC's legislated mandate. 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.

#### 4. Access to Escorted Temporary Absences

**Description:** Individuals, particularly those in medium-security, reported significant challenges to accessing escorted temporary absences (ETAs) throughout their incarceration. Some reported being told by CSC staff that ETAs were being cancelled due to a lack of volunteers available to accompany individuals during temporary absences from the penitentiary.

Advocates received reports that institutional parole officers are suspending or cancelling ETAs without meaningfully considering or discussing least restrictive measures, informal resolution, or other alternatives with the individual concerned. Individuals reported that, where an incident is perceived to undermine progress on a correctional plan, a conversation and consideration of alternative measures would be preferable to immediate ETA suspension or cancellation. Such an approach would also be more consistent with law, policy, and CSC's mandate. ETA suspensions and cancellations can have significant consequences for an individual's ability to access the continuum of release, including day parole, and should be considered as a last resort by penitentiary staff. Several individuals that met with advocates reported feeling fearful that ETA suspensions would impact their access to day parole.

**Discussion:** Advocates and IMT discussed access to conditional release more broadly during the August 21 meeting, as advocates continued to receive reports of challenges accessing ETAs throughout August.

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

CCRA, section 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 [people in prison] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community.

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.



CD 700 (Correctional interventions), section 10(e): Parole officers will facilitate the reintegration of [people who are incarcerated] into community at the earliest possible date while ensuring public and staff safety in all case management decisions.

**CAEFS Recommendations:** Supporting access to the continuum of release through the timely provision of temporary absences throughout an individual's period of incarceration is consistent with CSC's legislated mandate and the principles of Creating Choices. As evidence consistently demonstrates that gradual, structured release is the most effective pathway to successful community reintegration, access to ETAs remains an important component of correctional planning and to the successful reintegration of federally sentenced people to community.

### **August Advocacy Visit**

#### **1. Access to Healthcare: Individuals with Complex Care Needs**

**Description:** Two individuals provided CAEFS advocates with signed consent to raise urgent healthcare concerns with FVI's IMT. Both reported complex healthcare needs and that their respective conditions had worsened during incarceration. Both reported limited access to specialists and identified the stress of the penitentiary environment and restrictions on autonomy over their bodies and health as contributing to their declining health. One individual reported that several healthcare requests had gone unanswered beyond the 15-day timeframe.

**Discussion:** With the signed consent, advocates and IMT discussed these individuals' level of access to healthcare at FVI as a healthcare manager was present at the meeting. IMT said continued follow up with these individuals would be provided.

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

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.

Commissioner's Directive 800 (Health Services), section 2: The Regional Director, Health Services, will ensure: (a) the provision of health services to [incarcerated persons] in Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) institutions and in the community, in accordance with relevant legislation, professionally accepted standards, CSC policies and practice directives; (b) implementation of procedures to monitor and evaluate the quality and timeliness of health services and in a manner that promotes patient safety and quality improvement.

**CAEFS Recommendations:** CAEFS appreciates FVI's responsiveness to these reported healthcare concerns. As the administrator of healthcare in federal penitentiaries, CSC is responsible for ensuring that individuals in federal custody have access to essential, dignity-preserving, patient-centered care. CAEFS encourages CSC to consider community-based healthcare providers wherever possible, in support of its legislated responsibilities and to ensure that access to physical and mental healthcare for federally incarcerated people is not securitized.



## 2. Access to Library Services and Supports

**Description:** Individuals in medium-security reported decreased access to library services at FVI over the past several weeks. Individuals reported attempting to access law books and other legal materials but being unable to check them out due to the continued absence of the penitentiary librarian. Individuals reported uncertainty about whether the librarian's absence is related to CSC budget cuts or if it is a temporary reduction in library services due to illness or vacation. Individuals noted the importance of continued access to the library and its services, not only for accessing legal materials, but also for supporting reintegration planning and well-being.

**Discussion:** IMT shared that the librarian is away unexpectedly and is expected to return in early fall. IMT acknowledged the importance of maintaining continued access to the library and its services and advised that individuals with specific needs related to library access are encouraged to submit a request to the Assistant Warden of Interventions' office.

### **Law/Policy:**

CCRA, section 4 (c2): The Service ensures the effective delivery of programs of [incarcerated 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, section 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.

Corrections and Conditional Release Regulations (CCRR), section 97(3): The Service shall ensure that an [incarcerated person] has reasonable access to (a) legal counsel and legal reading materials; (b) non-legal materials.

CD 720 (Education programs and services for [incarcerated people], section 6(g): The Institutional Head will ensure that library services support all institutional programs and address the [incarcerated persons'] needs for computer literacy and recreational, cultural, religious, spiritual, educational, legal and informative materials, while taking into consideration the requirements of the correctional environment.

**CAEFS Recommendations:** CAEFS encourages FVI to ensure that access to library services is maintained without interruption and that individuals can access legal and other essential materials in a timely manner. Federally incarcerated people do not have access to the internet and therefore rely on penitentiary libraries for access to information. Continued access to library services is critical to upholding legal and human rights, supporting reintegration planning, and promoting the well-being of incarcerated populations in Canada.

## 3. Peer-Led Committees

**Description:** Advocates received reports of challenges to the autonomy and operations of peer-led committees at FVI. The Inmate Wellness Committee (IWC) reported purchasing a barbecue to meet the needs of the population and mitigate the impacts of heat from using ovens and stoves inside the living units during the summer months. According to the IWC, the barbecue was purchased and installed by the Works Department, which is responsible for penitentiary infrastructure and maintenance, without notifying or informing the IWC of its installation. The barbecue was then utilized without a gas converter and during non-movement times. The institution subsequently restricted access to the IWC-purchased barbecue



to once per month for each living unit. The IWC reported that, had they been informed of the installation, they would have prepared and distributed posters outlining instructions and community guidelines for its use. The IWC expressed concern that, despite purchasing the barbecue for the benefit of the population, they had little control over its installation and its use due to lack of communication from penitentiary staff. The IWC shared that the lack of communication and collaboration with CSC staff in this instance undermined their ability to effectively carry out their peer-led role and contributed to unnecessary restrictions on a committee-purchased item.

Advocates received reports from the Indigenous Wellness Committee and the People with Life Sentences Committee that they have been unable to access the maximum-security unit. Representatives reported a significant need for committee access to the maximum-security population, particularly regarding access to Indigenous cultural activities and items. The People with Life Sentences Committee shared the importance of connecting with newly admitted people with life or long-term sentences and who require support and community during their transition to the maximum-security environment. Individuals classified at security levels one and two within the maximum-security unit cannot leave the unit. As such, access to prosocial supports, including peer-led committees, is particularly important for maintaining connections with the broader FVI community.

The People with Life Sentences committee also reported not having office space or receiving employment pay for their committee work. The committee expressed interest in discussing changes to their current operations with institutional management.

**Discussion:** IMT said it is complying with the Commissioner's Directives (CD) regarding monthly barbecue access. Advocates clarified that the relevant CD applies to penitentiary-purchased items, whereas this barbecue was purchased by the IWC.<sup>2</sup> At IWC's request, advocates discussed the possibility of a staggered approach to restoring more regular access to the barbecue for the population. IMT also confirmed that both the People with Life Sentences Committee and the Indigenous Wellness Committee will be permitted access to the maximum-security unit, with arrangements to be coordinated between the Correctional Manager and committee Chairs and Co-Chairs. IMT advised that committees wishing to discuss specific work or employment matters should submit a request to FVI's Manager of Programs.

### Law/Policy:

CCRA, section 4(d): [Incarcerated 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.

CCRA, section 74: The Service shall provide [incarcerated people] with the opportunity to contribute to decisions of the Service affecting the [incarcerated] population as a whole, or affecting a group within the [incarcerated] population, except decisions relating to security matters.

**CAEFS Recommendations:** CAEFS encourages FVI's IMT to continue collaborating with and supporting peer-led committees. Peer-led committees are an essential element of the Creating Choices model of incarceration and are supported by various principles under the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. They promote democracy, shared

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<sup>2</sup> According to section 68 of Guideline 880-1: Food Services (Central Feeding), barbecues are to be made available up to once per month through the penitentiary's Small Group Meal Preparation Program. As this barbecue was purchased by the IWC rather than provided by the penitentiary, the level of access is not dictated by this Guideline.



responsibility, and empowerment, while providing individuals with opportunities to build community, contribute positively to the penitentiary environment, and develop transferable vocational skills that support community re-entry.

#### **4. Access to Community Reintegration Supports**

**Description:** Individuals reported that FVI does not currently have a reintegration worker or staff member specifically designated to support reintegration. They identified a community-based worker with regular access to the population as a beneficial resource for strengthening community engagement and developing prosocial supports within the community.

FVI recently hosted a job fair, but attendees noted that participating employers were primarily focused on labour and construction, which did not reflect the diverse needs of the population, particularly people with mobility challenges and those aging in custody. Advocates also heard that vocational and educational opportunities on life skills and technology are limited. Microsoft Office, administrative skills, and online banking were identified as modern and relevant learning opportunities that feel transferable to community. Limited computer access and the need to purchase USBs to save documents were also identified as barriers to resume writing and maintaining community connections, such as letter-writing to churches, community members, prospective employers, and halfway houses.

**Discussion:** IMT stated that they will provide advocates with a list of employers participating in the job fair. They also agreed to share the results of a recent survey conducted by CORCAN, the CSC department responsible for employment and vocational training for federally incarcerated people in Canada. Advocates offered to support and encourage individuals in developing proposals for educational and vocational learning opportunities.

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

CCRA, section 3(b): The purpose of the federal correctional system is to contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by assisting the rehabilitation of [federally sentenced people] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community.

CCRA, section 5 (c): There shall continue to be a correctional service in and for Canada, to be known as the Correctional Service of Canada, which shall be responsible for the preparation of [incarcerated people] for release.

**CAEFS Recommendations:** CAEFS encourages the CSC to consider and respond to the reintegration needs identified by women and gender-diverse people in its custody and under its supervision. The CSC must modernize employment programming within federal penitentiaries to include computer skills, digital literacy, and internet navigation to meet its legislated responsibility to prepare incarcerated people for their successful transition to the community.

#### **5. Access to Conditional Release: Application of Least Restrictive Measures and Informal Resolution**

**Description:** Advocates continue to meet with individuals whose ETAs have been cancelled or suspended, reportedly without access to informal resolution or consideration of less restrictive alternatives. Some individuals reported that their ETAs were suspended following voluntary disclosure of substance use during incarceration to their institutional parole officers or primary workers, but that they were not offered informal resolution or alternatives to ETA cancellation or suspension.



**Discussion:** IMT stated that they carefully consider informal resolutions and encourage individuals to be open with their case management teams about substance use. They indicated that when individuals disclose substance use, IMT is more likely to consider informal resolutions or alternatives to ETA suspension or cancellation.

**Law/Policy:**

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 3(b): The purpose of the federal correctional system is to contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by assisting the rehabilitation of [people in prison] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community.

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

**CAEFS Recommendations:** Substance use is increasingly recognized by the medical community as a health disorder and crisis in public health. People who experience substance use while incarcerated should have access to harm reduction and community-based health supports that address their physical and mental health needs, rather than face punitive measures, such as the cancellation of temporary release opportunities. Ensuring consistent access to temporary absences, including ETAs, supports CSC's legislated purpose and recognizes conditional release as a key pathway to successful reintegration, consistent with the principles of Creating Choices.

## 6. Access to Law and Policy

**Description:** Advocates were made aware that the medium-security population has access to one computer containing federal laws, regulations, and Commissioner's Directives, with printing capability. Advocates learned that the limited number of discs containing federal laws, regulations, and policies also include FVI's catalogue, creating competing demands for access. Advocates further noted limited access to legal and policy resources due to the continued absence of an FVI librarian.

**Discussion:** IMT said they will look into this reported issue.

**Law/Policy:**

CCRA, section 3(b): The purpose of the federal correctional system is to contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by assisting the rehabilitation of [federally sentenced people] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community.



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

CCRR, section 97(3): The Service shall ensure that an [incarcerated person] has reasonable access to (a) legal counsel and legal reading materials; (b) non-legal materials, including (i) Commissioner's Directives, and (ii) regional instructions and institutional standing orders, except those relating to security matters [...].

**CAEFS Recommendations:** CAEFS is committed to fostering a climate of legal literacy within penitentiaries, and we hope that FVI will work alongside us to ensure that access to relevant laws and policies is supported, and free from barriers. CAEFS encourages FVI to consider population-identified solutions to increase access to legal materials, across security classifications.

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*

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