CAEFS
Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies

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

October 15, 2026

Re: CAEFS Regional Advocacy Visit, September 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 September 17, 2026.

This letter summarizes reports received and conditions observed by the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) during our advocacy visits on September 2, 15 and 16 It also includes a summary of the discussion that took place during the September 17 meeting, identifies relevant laws and policies, and sets out CAEFS' recommendations.

Thank you, and we look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

S. Thompson

Shelby Thompson
Lead Advocate, Atlantic Regional Advocacy Team, CAEFS

Geographic Dislocation from Home Community and Lack of Inter-Regional Release Planning Capacity

Description: People reported feeling pressured to reintegrate within the Atlantic region, despite them having established released plans and supportive connections in other areas. Many people who had experienced involuntary transfer from the Ontario Region shared that they are facing barriers with gradual release, including when trying to access opportunities for Unescorted Temporary Absences (UTAs) and completion of day parole, which have been attributed to capacity pressures within the region.
Other individuals reported that their release planning documentation inaccurately represented them as wishing to reintegrate in the Atlantic Region, despite their having identified established release plans and supportive connections in other regions. Individuals expressed concern that these inaccuracies were subsequently relied upon in decisions affecting their access to parole.

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.
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> *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 individuals] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens.
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> *Creating Choices: The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women* (1990), Principle #2: Meaningful and Responsible Choice: "If Opportunities for meaningful and responsible choices are provided, life inside prison will better mirror life outside, and so will provide a more realistic environment in which to foster self-sufficiency and responsibility."

Discussion: Management expressed that national population pressures have limited the geographic availability of gradual release opportunities, and that individuals already incarcerated within a region are often prioritized for available placements. Management encouraged individuals experiencing barriers to gradual release or inter-regional release planning to bring their specific concerns forward.

Recommendation: CSC must ensure involuntary inter-regional transfers do not create subsequent barriers to gradual or conditional release. Individuals should be supported in pursuing release in the community where they have identified meaningful family, community, housing, or other reintegration supports, regardless of the region in which they are currently incarcerated. CSC should ensure adequate inter-regional capacity for UTAs, day parole, and release planning so that individuals are not effectively pressured to alter their intended region of reintegration. More broadly, CAEFS recommends that CSC discontinue the use of inter-regional placements as a population management strategy.

Understanding of Processes between Population and Management

Description: CAEFS met with several individuals who expressed confusion regarding which staff member or position they should be escalating their concerns to. One individual gave an example, sharing that she was unaware that concerns related to Institutional Parole Officers (IPO's) should be directed to the Manager of Assessments and Interventions (MAI). Individuals suggested that an organizational flow chart to guide them in this regard would be a very helpful tool.

Individuals and committees also expressed that there are not clear processes surrounding timelines for responses to proposals from the population, and that there has been a lack of follow up taken from items raised at the previous Inmate Committee (IC) meeting. CAEFS noted the same, that many agenda items often return from the previous month. People expressed frustration towards this, sharing that the process was very slow and ineffective, causing long delays to solutions they raise related to the conditions of confinement raised by the population.

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.
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> CD 083: s.48(b): inform the Inmate Committee of the decision(s) taken to address the issues and concerns raised.

Discussion: CAEFS expressed appreciation that during the IC meeting, the Institutional Head offered her support with proposal development. This type of encouragement will go a long way to promote strong relationships and healthy solution development structures in the institution. Management shared that issues raised at IC meetings often include procedural steps that can cause delay to the resolution of these issues and acknowledged that these delays can be frustrating. The IMT expressed that they have removed maintenance issues from IC meetings and that they will continue to adopt the meetings to ensure they are proactive.

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that CSC develop and make easily accessible an organizational flow chart identifying institutional roles and appropriate avenues for raising and escalating concerns. CAEFS further recommends that CSC establish a timely and transparent process for responding to proposals raised by the population, including providing proactive, substantive updates on items and communicating anticipated timelines for resolution. CAEFS recommends that the IMT add agenda items to the IC meetings where follow up can be offered to previous items, to relieve the population of the burden of re-raising issues.

<u>Due Process and Access to Complete, Accurate, and Up to Date Information</u>

Description: Individuals reported that they are being impacted by processes which lack procedural clarity and fairness, driven by their lack of access to information that is being used about them in decision making. This is producing many consequences, including direct impacts related to decisions made about them while in custody, and their access to support for opportunities for release. People shared experiences of discovering that they had been involved in security reports, or have had allegations placed against them, but were unaware of this information until learning about it through a negative report and/or decision, creating significant substantive impacts. One

individual shared that she had only learned of an allegation related to security concerns upon receiving a report related to her six-month pay review. She had not received a disciplinary charge, nor had anyone on her CMT addressed the report with her. Thus, she had not had any means to account for, defend, or context the information being used against her. Similar experiences were reported by many.

Law and Policy:

> *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* s. 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.
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> *CCRA* s. 4(b): the Service enhances its effectiveness and openness through the timely exchange of relevant information with victims, [incarcerated individuals] and other components of the criminal justice system and through communication about its correctional policies and programs to victims, [incarcerated individuals] and the public;
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> *CCRA* s. 24(1): The Service shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that any information about an [incarcerated individual] that it uses is as accurate, up to date and complete as possible.
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> *CCRA* s. 27(1): Where an [incarcerated individual] is entitled by this Part or the regulations to make representations in relation to a decision to be taken by the Service about the [incarcerated individual], the person or body that is to take the decision shall, subject to subsection (3), give the [incarcerated individual], a reasonable period before the decision is to be taken, all the information to be considered in the taking of the decision or a summary of that information.

Discussion: Management expressed that people should be receiving information about them in meetings with their CMT in ongoing manners. CAEFS emphasized the harms of a system that does not have due process, and management expressed a desire for individuals who were experiencing this to raise the issue with their CMT's and management directly.

Recommendation: CSC must ensure individuals are provided with timely access to information, including reports and allegations, that may inform decisions affecting their conditions of confinement, institutional opportunities, security classification, or release. CSC should ensure individuals have a meaningful opportunity to review and respond to this information, and to identify and seek correction of inaccurate or incomplete information before it adversely impacts them.

Access to Mental Health Support

Description: People reported to CAEFS that mental health services were adequate and easily accessible. Individuals shared that they were able to access mental health services regularly, including in the context of crisis response and support. While some individuals raised concerns about insensitive responses from Behavioral Interventionists (BIs) in the Supported Living Environment (SLE), overall access to institutional mental health services was reported positively.

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.

86 (1) The Service shall provide every [incarcerated person] with
(a) essential health care;

Discussion: Management was pleased to hear the positive feedback CAEFS received regarding individuals' access to mental health services.

Recommendation: CAEFS recognizes the positive feedback received regarding access to mental health services at NIFW and encourages CSC to continue building upon these practices.

Staff Conduct

Description: Some individuals reported concerns regarding staff professionalism. Individuals reported adversarial comments from staff members who are responsible for distributing essential items, with people sharing further that staff restricted these items unnecessarily, including cleaning supplies, and that the staff person made unnecessary unprofessional comments when individuals requested items. An individual shared with CAEFS that in one instance, a staff member was instigating a physical escalation, during a verbal argument between an individual and their incarcerated house mate. They explained that the staff member was encouraging them to "come swing" and used profane language towards them following the incident. This individual shared that when they asked, staff refused to disclose their name, subsequently prohibiting them from filing a complaint about this staff member directly. A different individual also reported that following a conversation with their IPO, their parole officer "stormed off" and left them to escort themselves out of the parole office area.

Law and Policy:

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

CCRA s. 69: No person shall administer, instigate, consent to or acquiesce in any cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment of an [incarcerated person].

Discussion: The Institutional Management Team expressed that they take instances of staff misconduct seriously. They also expressed that security staff must disclose their names to individuals. Management asked for people who experienced specific instances of misconduct to come forward, to ensure they could investigate and follow up.

Recommendation: CSC must ensure all staff engage with incarcerated people in a respectful, professional, and non-adversarial manner, with particular emphasis on de-escalation and conduct that respects individual dignity and promotes a supportive environment. CAEFS further recommends that CSC ensure staff are readily identifiable to incarcerated people so that concerns regarding staff conduct can be meaningfully documented and addressed through existing complaint and grievance processes.

Access to Choice, Empowerment, and a Supportive Environment – Financial Insecurity

Description: Individuals reported being adversely impacted by CSC's annual limit of $850 in transferred funds, per year, and cannot earn enough to offset this low amount of annually permitted spending. As result, people report being structurally denied from being able to purchase essential items required for them to live in a dignified, safe manner. One example of this is winter boots; Previously issues boots were issued by the institution, however the population reports that all boots were confiscated by Nova management earlier this year, requiring every individual needing winter footwear to source boots independently. One individual shared that the cost of one pair of winter boots is equivalent to six months of institutional pay from her job. Boots add to a growing list of items that people must obtain on their own, despite that failure to have adequate footwear in winter months can lead to significant health, safety, and wellness consequences.

Further, people shared that there are a lack of employment opportunities at Nova; many people are without jobs, despite strong desire to work. Together, and considering the very low wages people earn, federally sentenced women and gender diverse people are being subjected to enforced institutional poverty. One individual shared with CAEFS that she has been in Nova for one year and just received employment two weeks prior. High rates of unemployment coupled with low earnings, and institutional limits on available funds to be utilized from people's savings or sent from family members are impacting people's ability to access adequate clothing, hygiene items, nutritional and health products, communication costs with their family, and more. People described having to prioritize different aspects of their wellness over one another; having to choose between purchasing laundry soap, phone time with their family, multivitamins, because they cannot afford them all.

Law and 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.
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> *CCRR* s. 83(2): The Service shall take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of every [incarcerated individual] and that every [incarcerated individual] is
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> (a): adequately clothed and fed; …
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> (c): provided with toilet articles and all other articles necessary for personal health and cleanliness;

Discussion: Management expressed that the $850.00 annual transfer from savings to spending account limits are not set at the institutional level, but are a national directive. They shared that they are working to increase employment positions within the institution, and are exploring work release opportunities. Management shared that they do provide all essentially required items and reiterated the opportunities individuals have to purchase non essential items. There is a lack of clarity as to whether winter boots will be continued to be considered an essential

item and supplied. In relation to health supplements, healthcare shared that individuals receive screening for vitamin deficiencies and are not required to pay for supplements when there are identified needs.

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that CSC ensure all individuals have access, without personal cost, to adequate clothing, hygiene supplies, and other items necessary to maintain their health and dignity. CAEFS further recommends that CSC address institutional poverty by increasing meaningful and adequately compensated employment opportunities and reviewing restrictions on access to personal funds where these restrictions prevent individuals from meeting their basic needs.

Access to Justice

Description: People reported issues to CAEFS related to accessing justice. One person described an incident where they were attending court by video when another incarcerated individual connected to the same video call and interrupted the proceedings. She shared that the judge was frustrated by the disorganization and disconnected from the call, delaying her court matter.

CAEFS also received reports that the only available computer in the maximum security unit was not working; and people did not have access to law and policy due to the computer being inoperable. People also reported that many numbers on the institution's common access list were not working, including the Human Rights Commission, and the Office of the Correctional Investigator (OCI). People also reported to CAEFS experiencing barriers and delays in trying to fax legal documents.

Law and Policy:

> CCRA s. 4(b): the Service enhances its effectiveness and openness through the timely exchange of relevant information with victims, [incarcerated people] and other components of the criminal justice system and through communication about its correctional policies and programs to victims, [incarcerated people] and the public;
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> *CCRA* s. 4 (d): [incarcerated individuals] retain the rights of all members of society except those that are, as a consequence of the sentence, lawfully and necessarily removed or restricted;
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> *CCRA* s. 4(f): correctional decisions are made in a forthright and fair manner, with access by the [incarcerated person] to an effective grievance procedure;

Discussion: Management responded that they were aware of the security incident related to video court, and had taken steps to investigate and resolve the issue. Related to the computer in the maximum security unit, management responded that individuals could put in request forms to access the law and policy they needed. CAEFS offered to donate a computer to the institution to support resolution of the issue. Management expressed a desire to promptly address the issues with access to phone numbers on the institutional common access list.

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that CSC take proactive steps to ensure that individuals have timely, reliable, and confidential access to courts, legal information and documents, and law and policy. Following CAEFS meeting with the IMT, staff worked quickly to resolve issues related to the telephone system. Related to the paucity of computers available to incarcerated women and gender diverse people, CAEFS strongly encourages the CSC to resolve the matter and ensure that the maximum unit has more than one working computer available. Federally

sentenced people should not and cannot be expected to know what law and policy to request. Broad access to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and Commissioner's Directives is the only manner, except through CAEFS services and resources, whereby individuals can proactively learn about the policies regulating their experiences.

Physical Conditions of Confinement – Living Units

Description: People shared with CAEFS serious concerns about the physical condition of their living units. Individuals reported that at least one living unit (unit 3) is lacking adequate ventilation and de-humifying infrastructure, which frequently results in condensation buildup on the tile floor and rubber stair treads within the living units. One person reported an injury due to slipping on the stairs, which they attributed to the moisture. People shared that these conditions have also caused the drywall to deteriorate, causing a large hole in the walls which individuals have temporarily repaired with steel wool cleaning pads. Someone also noted that inside this unit, they must replace the shower curtain on a regular basis as it gets covered in black mold. While the individuals reporting the issues focused on the conditions of one particular living unit, they expressed that issues of disrepair were prevalent across the institution.

Law and 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.
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> *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.

Discussion: Management noted the reports raised by CAEFS about living unit 3 and shared that a new individual has been hired in the maintenance department. Management anticipates that this will resolve backlogs to institutional repairs.

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that CSC promptly address the ventilation, humidity, mold, and structural issues affecting the living units at Nova, including addressing the underlying causes of condensation and moisture accumulation. CSC should ensure that all living units provide safe, healthful, and dignified conditions of confinement that adequately protect the health, safety, and wellbeing of all incarcerated individuals.

Access to Family

Description: CAEFS received reports that individuals were experiencing barriers to accessing their family. People reported that video visits were cancelled due to staff not having the keys to unlock the computer needed to access. Individuals also wished to have more access to video visits broadly, with one minimum-security individual sharing that she was only allotted two 30-minute visits per week. Losing family connection because of incarceration is a permanent consequence that forever changes not just the lives of federally sentenced women and gender diverse

people, but produces generational harm for their loved ones and family members too, and should be avoided at all costs.

Law and Policy:

> *CCRA* s. 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 [incarcerated people] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the Community.
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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. 71(1): In order to promote relationships between [incarcerated persons] 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.

Discussion: Management shared that a misplaced key should not result in a missed visit, and that steps would be taken to avoid such an instance in the future. CAEFS raised that with so many individuals being incarcerated at NIFW from other regions, the importance of broad access to video visits is pressing.

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that CSC recognize and support the importance of maintaining family and community connections, particularly for women and gender-diverse people, by providing meaningful and regular opportunities for in-person and virtual visits. CSC should ensure that access to these relationships is not unnecessarily restricted by institutional practices, staffing, or administrative and technological barriers.

Access to Family and Community and Canada's Black Justice Strategy

Description: During this visit, multiple Black women reported issues and barriers in accessing their community supports and families, and with decision making at NIFW not being responsive to the needs and contexts of Black people. One individual in particular shared that she has been prohibited from visiting with her boyfriend, in the institution and that she was very concerned with her CMT preventing her from future access to him on conditional release due to what she describes as discrimination against his criminal history and social circumstances, despite this person being a close, positive source of support for her.
She raised that her visiting application was denied, and she was not given any opportunity for a less restrictive alternative such as closed visits, or steps she could take to obtain permission for visits. She speculated that the denial was likely based on a community assessment that she had significant concerns with but was not provided any clarity in the denial of her visiting application form. Not being able to engage in visits is causing her to feel isolated and weakening her ability to maintain her community contacts, and her ability to successfully release plan.

Law and Policy:

> *Canada's Black Justice Strategy*, recommendation 83: Amend Policies and Practices*:* "Revise existing policies and practices to ensure they are race-conscious and address the specific needs of Black prisoners. This includes reforming rehabilitation programs, intervention strategies, and reintegration plans to be more inclusive and effective for Black individuals."
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> CCRA s. 4(c): the Service uses the least restrictive measures consistent with the protection of society, staff members and [incarcerated people];
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> CCRA s. 4(d): [incarcerated individuals] retain the rights of all members of society except those that are, as a consequence of the sentence, lawfully and necessarily removed or restricted;
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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;

Discussion: CAEFS raised that because Black individuals are more likely to enter the prison system from communities that have been criminalized, it is important that people's contact with family and community supports should not be denied based on legal system involvement. We noted that the Black Justice Strategy provides an excellent training tool to ensure that decisions made about Black people are sensitive to histories of heightened police and legal system involvement. The MAI indicated that she would follow up on this matter, which CAEFS appreciated given the stress and impacts felt by the individual who was not supported for visits. CAEFS expressed concern with the outright denial of visits without reasons given, and the absence of less restrictive alternatives offered.

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that CSC meaningfully work to understand the ways that Black individuals face distinct barriers to maintaining connections to their families and communities. CSC should ensure that decisions affecting community supports, visits, temporary absences, and release planning are individualized, based on the least restrictive measures necessary, and build in sensitivity to the manners in which Black communities experience higher degrees of criminalization and police and legal system involvement.

Access to Conditional Release

Description: CAEFS continues to hear from individuals being impacted by delays to accessing parole. People reported delays in assessments and reports required by their IPO's or Primary Workers (PW's), often due to vacation or staff time off, subsequently resulting in them having to delay their parole. Several people reported that they had recently delayed their parole hearing by one or more months, with some feeling as though they did not have a choice. Some people reported to CAEFS that they felt as though they were given ultimatums by their IPO's. Others shared that their parole officers were refusing to meet, or no longer showing up to appointments, limiting communication and the ability to engage meaningfully with one's release plan.

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.

Discussion: Management commented that individual's IPO's are supportive of conditional release wherever possible, and that individuals with specific concerns are encouraged to reach out to their IPO directly, or the MIA.

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.