

Correcting Corrections Must be a Priority



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March 3, 2009 (Ottawa) – The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) commends the Correctional Investigator and his team for releasing a very thorough and thoughtful review of the experiences of Ashley Smith at the hands of the Correctional Service of Canada. It is a tragic and shameful account of correctional negligence that Mr. Sapers has aptly entitled a ‘preventable death’.

“The treatment of Ashley Smith reveals the urgent need for correctional accountability and the report includes many important recommendations aimed at preventing similar tragedies,” advised Lucie Joncas, President of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS). “There are still women in similar circumstances and conditions to those endured by Ashley. The government must ensure that this situation is remedied and we trust that they will act to end the Charter and human rights violations that persist.”

“We urge the Minister to issue a response to the report as soon as possible. We also urge the Government to recognize that many of the recommendations are not new. Calls for correctional accountability and judicial oversight echo those of the Commission of Inquiry chaired by Louise Arbour, the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the United Nations,” continued Kim Pate, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS). “Unfortunately, as the latest reports of the Correctional Service of Canada reveal, rather than attempting to right their wrongs, the federal prison service continues to ignore all independent assessments of their track record, and instead relies on internal or contracted investigations and reviews. As Ashley’s death reveals, such inaction and intransigence has resulted in irreplaceable losses.”

“We are also extremely concerned about the government’s law and order agenda, especially the potential it has to increase the numbers of women who will be crammed into our prison system – especially those who, like Ashley Smith, are isolated in segregation cells where their treatment creates or exacerbates mental health issues. We cannot stand idly by and let the decimation of human and Charter rights for these women continue,” announced Lucie Joncas, President of CAEFS. “We reiterate the call of the UN Human Rights Committee for Canada to establish external, independent correctional oversight and redress mechanisms that are comprehensive and accessible, as well as their denunciation of the policies and procedures in the federal prison system which results in women, who corrections recognizes pose a low risk to public safety, being classified as maximum-security prisoners.”

“If the recommendations of Mr. Sapers were implemented the first, second, even the third, fourth and fifth times they were made to previous Ministers and governments, there is every reason to believe that Ashley might be alive and with her family today. Action is required immediately to prevent further tragedies,” concluded Kim Pate.

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Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) is a federation of member societies who work with and on behalf of marginalized, victimized, criminalized, and imprisoned women and girls.

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