

# National Women's Group Rejects the Notion of an Omnibus Bill



Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies™  
Association canadienne des sociétés Elizabeth Fry  
701-151 Slater Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1P5H3  
Telephone : (613) 238-2422  
Facsimile : (613) 232-7130  
e-mail : caefs@web.ca  
Home Page : www.elizabethfry.ca

**October 17, 2007 (Ottawa)** – The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) urges Canadians to call for more social services, health care and educational and employment options, rather than the implementation of the government's U.S.-style plan to drain more resources from these basic needs areas in favour of more guns and longer prison terms. CAEFS is a federation of 26 local, community based service providers who work with and on behalf of marginalized victimized, criminalized, and imprisoned women and girls. "We are extremely concerned about the government's so called law and order agenda, especially their regressive law reform initiatives and their potential interference with opportunities for conditional release," announced Maître Lucie Joncas, President of the Canadian Association of the Elizabeth Fry Societies.

"The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies works tirelessly trying to stem the tide of the rapidly rising numbers of women in prison. The federal government's current direction, reinforced by the throne speech, is guaranteed to increase the numbers of imprisoned women. The government's emphasis on longer prison sentences is guaranteed to increase the numbers of imprisoned women. This direction ignores the inequity and outcomes associated with existing social, economic and health policies. In fact, it is likely to increase marginalization and systemic inequality, which is experienced disproportionately by Aboriginal and other racialized women and women with mental health issues. Jails are the only institutions that cannot say 'our beds are full', or, 'sorry, we have no more room' and yet they are increasingly being used to house people who need treatment, support and other forms of social and/or health services. All indications are that the proposed omnibus bill will only make this situation far worse, and at a tremendous fiscal and human cost to all Canadians," advised Kim Pate, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies.

"Minister Day's Blue Ribbon Panel is about to report on correctional operations and propose yet more changes. If they recommend federal super jails and fewer supervised release options, this too could make things far worse. Imprisonment is expensive – far more expensive, in fact, than other means of preventing crime. To keep a person incarcerated in Canada costs anywhere from \$50,000 to \$250,000 per year, depending upon the nature of the prison and the needs of the prisoner. If even just half of the seven billion dollars currently spent on imprisoning people was invested in welfare, housing, health, education and other community based services, the resulting resources would benefit whole communities, not merely those who are criminalized," concluded Dr. Ailsa Watkinson, Chair of CAEFS' Social Action Committee and also a volunteer member of the Executive of CAEFS.

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**Contact:**

Maître Lucie Joncas, President;  
Dr. Ailsa M. Watkinson, Social Action Committee Chair or  
Kim Pate, Executive Director  
at  
**613-298-2422**