



NEWS RELEASE

Correctional Officer at the Grand Valley Institution Arrested for Sexual Assault Against Prisoner

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OTTAWA, TUESDAY July 7, 2020 - Today, the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) has learned that a Correctional Officer at the Grand Valley Institution (GVI), a federal prison designated for women, was arrested and charged with 1 count of sexual assault against a prisoner in 2016.

“For years, CAEFS has been calling attention to how the power structures inherent to the prisons make those held inside incredibly vulnerable to abuse by CSC employees. This is particularly concerning for incarcerated women as most of them have experienced abuse prior to their prison sentence, including sexual abuse, and have extensive histories of trauma which is further perpetuated through their experience of incarceration. A clear example of this - and one that CAEFS has repeatedly advocated against - is CSC’s policy of routine strip searches, which is a form of state sanctioned sexual violence”. – Emilie Coyle, Executive Director of CAEFS

The arrest of the Correctional Officer from GVI follows the arrest of another Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) Correctional Officer at the Nova Institution for Women (Nova), another federal prison designated for women, in early May 2020. He was arrested and charged with 6 counts of sexual assault, 6 counts of breach of trust, and 1 count of trying to procure sexual service - all related to his work at Nova. His arrest came after multiple prisoners at Nova came forward to tell their experiences of being sexually assaulted.

That there are now multiple active cases against Correctional Officers for sexual assault in several institutions is indicative of the pervasiveness of sexual violence against incarcerated women. Prisons are not – and never will be – safe places, as by their very nature, prisons are violent and oppressive institutions.

The sexual abuse experienced by the woman at GVI, and the women who have come forward from Nova, is egregious. Now, during the COVID-19 crisis, with visits prohibited and significantly reduced access to external accountability mechanisms, there is less oversight than ever within CSC institutions, making prisoners even more vulnerable to all forms of abuse.

The issue of sexual coercion and violence in the prisons is of sufficient concern that the Office of the Correctional Investigator has launched a systemic investigation into this matter, the results of which will likely be released in the fall of 2020.

“Eliminating strip searching; ensuring that incarcerated people can readily access external counselling and treatment options for trauma and abuse; an increase in oversight and accountability mechanisms of and for CSC - all these should be implemented immediately. However, we must emphasize that reforming a violent system can only take us so far in preventing the abuse of vulnerable women. Rather than incarcerating women, we need to invest in building safe and supportive communities” - Emilie Coyle, Executive Director of CAEFS

CAEFS Ontario regional advocacy team continues to be available to support all of the prisoners at GVI. In addition, all federally incarcerated people in women’s prisons can access CAEFS advocacy support and services through our National Office 1-800-637-4606.

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For comments:

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