



NEWS RELEASE

Oversight of Segregation in Prisons not Operative: The Abolition of the Practice of Segregation is Necessary and Urgent

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OTTAWA, Thursday, August 27th 2020 – In 2019, CAEFS testified to the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology about our concerns with Bill C-83 and the implementation of the Structured Intervention Units (SIUs) which we argued would result in conditions of confinement much the same as those we saw under the administrative segregation regime, only with less procedural safeguards.

Discouragingly, last week, one of the few safeguards that was put in place, the Structured Intervention Unit – Implementation Advisory Panel (SIU-IAP), released a statement that not only do they no longer exist, but that they were never permitted to do their work in the first place.

In light of this, CAEFS reiterates our longstanding position that segregation is not a matter of name or space, but practice. That is, it is the act of isolating a prisoner from the rest of the prison population, whatever and however that is done. This *practice* should be abolished altogether, including the use of solitary confinement, maximum security units (and “secure units”), mental health monitoring, and all other forms of isolation and separation from the general prison population that carry similarly detrimental effects.

The abolition of the practice of segregation is necessary and as COVID –19 has so brutally demonstrated, urgent. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen a rise in the use of segregation, including the use of medical isolation to confine people to a cell for up to 23 hours a day in conditions largely indistinguishable from other forms of solitary confinement.

“The measures imposed during COVID-19 prioritize security over care. These measures are needlessly restrictive and have included indefinite lockdowns and extended periods of isolation. In addition to a deep concern for the health of prisoners, we are wary of the potential for grievous human rights violations, particularly given the lack of external oversight during the COVID-19 pandemic.” - Emilie Coyle, Executive Director of CAEFS

When introduced, Bill C-83 was heralded by the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) as the beginning of a “transformative era in Canadian federal corrections”. This has not been the case, and solitary confinement continues to occur in Canada, only under a new name. Minister Bill Blair’s recent affirmation to review the appointments of the Chair and members of the SIU-IAP and ensure that the Panel receives the necessary information to carry out their work does nothing to address the harm that is indivisible from the practice of segregation, in any form.

“We need real transformation in our justice system and in our communities. We can no longer settle for prison reforms that seek only to rebrand and make palatable what is undeniably an inhumane practice: a practice that disproportionately impacts and harms Indigenous women, and prisoners with mental illness” - Emilie Coyle, Executive Director of CAEFS

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For comment:

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