



**COUNCIL OF ELIZABETH  
FRY SOCIETIES OF  
ONTARIO**

**\*\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE PRESS RELEASE\*\*\***

## **A Systemic Response to Sexual Violence & Coercion Perpetrated by the Staff of Correctional Facilities is Needed in Ontario**

On April 9, 2021, media reported that a staff member at the Vanier Centre for Women, an Ontario provincial prison designated for women in Milton, Ontario was charged in connection with sexual assaults on two of the women incarcerated there. On May 23, 2023, media have now reported that this officer has been convicted of these sexual assaults.

The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) and the Council of Elizabeth Fry Societies of Ontario (CEFSO) are calling for action from the provincial government to address the persistent – and well known – systemic issue of sexual violence, harassment and coercion in Ontario prisons.

Urgent and wholistic action is needed to address this ongoing issue impacting the lives and wellbeing of people inside. Incarcerated people are isolated from external systems of support and must contend with the power imbalances between the Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General (SolGen) staff and prisoners. Incarcerated peoples' accounts of their experiences are often disbelieved by SolGen administration, who instead trust the accounting of their colleagues. This silencing of prisoners is facilitated by an absence of witnesses, and SolGen's lack of documentation and tracking of reports over time

"Our advocates visit and speak with hundreds of incarcerated women and gender diverse people across this province every year. We hear about and report on persistent examples of sexual harassment and coercion of incarcerated people. Despite these reports, institutions continue to fail to properly investigate these incidents and protect those in their care," says Cory Roslyn; "It is morally and legally incumbent on the Solicitor General and on the Ontario Provincial Government to act to finally address this persistent systemic issue - an issue that impacts incarcerated people and staff alike" noted Emilie Coyle, Executive Director of CAEFS.

The impact of sexual violence, abhorrent on its own, is amplified in a prison context, in part because many prisoners have already experienced sexual violence prior to their incarceration. "upwards of 90% of incarcerated women and gender diverse people have survived extensive histories of trauma and sexual violence prior to incarceration," says Cory Roslyn, Executive Director of Elizabeth Fry Society of Northeastern Ontario. "For that trauma to continue once inside is yet another system that has failed them and harmed them." CAEFS has previously highlighted the incredible power that Correctional Officers and other staff in prisons wield when it comes to the liberty of incarcerated people. Coming forward with a claim against a staff could result in retaliation that could jeopardize the very few things incarcerated people rely on during their incarceration such as access to programming, visits from family members, receiving/sending mail and time outdoors. Despite this, incarcerated people continue to share their stories.

*About CEFSO: The Council of Elizabeth Fry Societies of Ontario (CEFSO) is the provincial voice for eight Elizabeth Fry Societies in Ontario. CEFSO monitors the conditions for both provincially and federally sentenced women in prison, through visits to jails and direct contact with women, and advocates for improvements to those conditions.*

*About CAEFS: Since its inception in 1978, the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) has worked to address the persistent ways in which women and gender-diverse people impacted by criminalization have been denied humanity and excluded from community. CAEFS advocacy utilizes a feminist rights-based approach and recognizes that, to create substantive equality, unique attention and approaches are needed to respond to incarcerated equity-deserving groups.*

**For further information or questions please contact:**

The Council of Elizabeth Fry Societies of Ontario

T: 705-673-1364 x210

@: croslyn@efryneo.com