



CANADIAN PRISON LAW ASSOCIATION

Canada's Prison Justice Advocates Call for Public Inquiry into Abuse, Mismanagement at Edmonton Institution

Thursday, March 12, 2020

CANADA — The Canadian Prison Law Association (CPLA) is calling on the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness and the Office of the Correctional Investigator to commence a public inquiry into findings of systemic abuse and mismanagement at the Correctional Service of Canada's Edmonton Institution.

In the most recent annual review of the federal prison system, released in February 2020, the Correctional Investigator devoted an entire section to systemic issues at Edmonton Institution that continue to exist at the prison despite numerous attempts to resolve them. The report found that the prison's failure to protect inmates from assaults committed by other prisoners and rampant workplace sexual harassment were the result "a culture of impunity" that has long existed at Edmonton Institution. Even worse, he found that "it appears that staff and management of Edmonton Institution colluded in behaviour that anywhere else would be considered offensive, possibly even criminal." The *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*, which sets out the powers of the Correctional Investigator, authorizes the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness and the Correctional Investigator to commence public inquiries into matters related to the federal prison system.

In 2018, after another serious incident at Edmonton Institution, prison justice advocates called for a public inquiry into the problems at Edmonton Institution. The current Correctional Investigator, Ivan Zinger, responded to the request by stating that the legislation that gives him the power to hold an inquiry has not been used since it was enacted in 1992, and would entail significant expense and "The vast majority of the concerns raised on complaints by inmates are addressed at the institutional level through discussion, negotiation and compromise. Proceedings of this nature would substantively transform the office and undermine our ability to resolve inmate complaints against the service in a fair, informal and expeditious manner."

In his February 2020 report he wrote: "Several advocates have called for a public inquiry to address the underlying malfeasance" but he did not comment on whether one should be held. The CPLA position is it is beyond obvious the time for hoping an informal resolution process would be effective has long since expired.

"For more than a decade, the Correctional Investigator has documented cases of violence, institutional neglect, and sexual harassment at Edmonton Institution, targeting both inmates and

staff, and nothing appears to be changing,” said Tom Engel, President of the CPLA. “There is something rotten happening at Edmonton Institution, and it is placing the lives of inmates and staff at risk.”

“Despite successive investigations and reports completed by the Correctional Investigator highlighting the serious dysfunction at Edmonton Institution, and continual assurances from the federal government that it will address these problems, the same problems persist.

“The only way that we can get to the bottom of why Edmonton Institution remains a dangerous place for people to serve prison time or work is by holding a public inquiry tasked with revealing the scale of the problems to the public and identifying solutions with relevant stakeholders”, Engel said.

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