

January 2021

Honourable Bill Blair,  
Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness  
Government of Canada

Dear Minister Blair

**Re: Correctional Services Canada Risk Assessment Tools for Women**

For years, the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) has advocated for compassionate and fair treatment of federally sentenced women. Sadly, once again we must raise our concerns as we read media reports regarding the failure of risk assessment tools employed by Correctional Services Canada (CSC).

These assessment instruments that determine inmates' security classifications, access to treatment programs and services, and impact the possibility of parole are biased against women; racialized and Indigenous women are especially vulnerable.

The report by the Globe and Mail (December 31, 2020) outlines the concerns addressed within a system that seems incapable of reform. As you are well aware, for nearly 20 years this issue has been raised by numerous agencies and researchers including the Canadian Human Rights Commission, the Office of the Correctional Investigator, the Auditor General, and researchers such as Dr. Cheryl Webster at the University of Ottawa and university of Toronto criminologist, Dr. Anthony Doob as well as the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS). In 2004-05, CSC itself promised to develop a new initial classification tool for women. The has failed to materialize.

As with other professional systems, including medicine, it has been found that instruments and practices designed based on a male model cannot in general be applied to women. CSC must address this issue that impacts the lives of women who are much less likely than men to be violent and who turn to crime for different reasons than their male counterparts. As pointed out by Dr. Shelly Brown, a psychology professor at Carleton University, thought must be given to the questions asked, how scores are assigned, and ensure adherence to fairness.

The members of the NCWC urge you to ensure that this issue is addressed as a priority and that change is imminent.

Sincerely  
Patricia Leson, President  
National Council of Women of Canada

***The National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) works in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, acknowledging Canada is the traditional territory of Indigenous and Metis People. We are grateful to join with others in peace and hope, advocating for an improved quality of life for women, children, families, and society.***

*\*Original text prepared by Monica Cullum, NCWC Convenor for Federally Sentenced Women*

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