

## Letter Writing Campaign in Support of Federal Prison Library Staff

We call on individuals and groups such as book clubs and organizations across Turtle Island to write to their MP and to Canada's Minister of Public Safety, and relevant Deputy Commissioners regarding Correction Services Canada (CSC)'s decision to permanently remove library staff from federal prison libraries.

### Who to Write to:

[Your Member of Parliament](#)

Minister of Public Safety Gary Anandasangaree

[gary.anand@parl.gc.ca](mailto:gary.anand@parl.gc.ca)

[ps.ministerofpublicsafety-ministredelasecuritepublique.sp@ps-sp.gc.ca](mailto:ps.ministerofpublicsafety-ministredelasecuritepublique.sp@ps-sp.gc.ca)

Commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada, Talal Dakalbab

[Talal.Dakalbab@csc-scc.gc.ca](mailto:Talal.Dakalbab@csc-scc.gc.ca)

Sr Deputy Commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada, France Gratton

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### Background

Prison libraries have existed in federal correctional institutions since the 1830s. In the mid-1900s and overseen by Correctional Services Canada (CSC), federal institutions were instructed (through Commissioner Directives) to have libraries that would mirror those that could be found outside of the prison. From then on, CSC has stated it has been committed to a public library model. This model also included the hiring of dedicated and professional librarians and library staff. Historically, Canada's federal prisons have been the only prisons in Canada to have funded and staffed prison libraries. Over the past years, funding cuts, safety and security issues, and calls for being "tough on crime" have made the existence of the prison library precarious. Libraries staffed by trained professionals are seen as expendable and not necessary for the running of the library, its services, and programs.

### What CSC is proposing:

*"As we modernize how inmates access information, CSC will also phase out the remaining Librarian positions. Many sites already operate a modern library model without a dedicated librarian, and we will adopt this model nationally to ensure consistency. Libraries will remain fully open and accessible to inmates, and CSC will continue to invest in maintaining modern,*

*up-to-date book collections. Institutions will also build stronger partnerships with local public libraries to expand inmate access to information and library resources.”*

**Why this is not adequate:**

- This proposal is vague, contains misinformation, and is misleading. CSC libraries do not currently have “modern” libraries that reflect public libraries.
- The decision to remove librarians also goes against the Correctional Service Canada's [National Guide for Institutional Libraries](#) (2012), which includes librarians. The guidelines in their [Commissioner Directive 720](#) regarding what prison libraries offer require librarians and Library workers to be properly fulfilled.
- They do not define what a modern library is. CSC libraries have physical books but no digital resources and no access to the internet. Some institutions have limited digital content available on tablets that require inmates to pay high fees and have their personal data shared with tablet manufacturers.
- While volunteers or other prison staff may be able to open a library space, making physical books available, they do not have the expertise to provide the collection development, programs, and services that library professionals are trained for and provide.
- Partnerships with local libraries are not a feasible solution. It is not within the mandates of public libraries to serve federal prisons. Public libraries cannot circulate their physical collections to prisons or provide access to their digital resources in prisons. Public libraries do not receive funding and staffing that would allow them to provide outreach services for programs to prisons. Logistically, volunteer and partnership programming in prisons face numerous barriers and censorship.

**The key message:** “We urge Correctional Services Canada to abandon this misguided plan to phase out the role of librarians and library workers, and instead to consult with library professionals going forward, and to fulfil its legal obligation to meet the information needs of community members who are incarcerated.”

**Important facts:**

- Librarians and Library workers:
  - develop high-quality, diverse, and responsive collections that respond to the complex information needs of the incarcerated population
  - Provide the legally required access to legal information for inmates
  - Advocate for incarcerated Indigenous people in their right to access resources on Indigenous histories, cultures, languages, and materials about the impacts of

colonialism. Prison libraries and their staff contribute to Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action #30 and 38 and #36

- Provide programming and workshops
- assist with school projects and other educational research
- support accessing information and resources to plan for release and reentry
- Benefit the daily lives of inmates
- Librarians have Masters degree education and other Library Workers, such as Library Assistants and Library Technicians, hold specialized diplomas/degrees. Their skills and expertise cannot be replaced by volunteers.
- In their 2020-2021 Annual Report, Canada's Correctional Investigator has identified federal prisons as "[program service delivery that is obsolete and inexplicably information-depriving](#)".
- Libraries in prison support literacy - encouraging a multiliteracies approach and low literacy patrons. According to [United for Literacy](#), a Canadian organization providing literacy programs in prisons, "literacy initiatives support individuals in building resilience and discovering options". This, in turn, helps reduce recidivism as community members reintegrate.
- Several standards and guidelines outline the importance of libraries in prisons staffed by library professionals, including:
  - The American Library Association's [Standards for Library Services for the Incarcerated and Detained](#) (2024)
  - The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions [Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners](#) (2023)
  - The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners -also called the [Nelson Mandela Rules](#) (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015).
  - The Canadian Federation of Library Associations' endorsement of the Prison Network: [Prisoners' Right to Read Statement](#) (2024)
  - Access to information is part of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

### **Resources:**

Examples of letters already written:

[JOINT STATEMENT REGARDING PLAN TO PHASE OUT CSC LIBRARIANS AND LIBRARY WORKERS](#)

[Open Letter to the Minister of Public Safety - Book Clubs for Inmates](#)

## SAMPLE TEMPLATE

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Mr./Mrs./Ms./Mx. (full name), M.P. or The Honourable (full name), P.C., M.P.

House of Commons

Ottawa, ON

K1A 0A6

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms./Mx. (surname):

I am writing to you today with great concern about the proposed removal of librarians and library staff from federal prisons.

I understand that Correctional Services of Canada (CSC) have been tasked to remove \$132 million and that there are difficult decisions to make. However, I strongly urge you to reconsider this misguided plan to phase out the library staff who are committed to literacy, information access, and life-long learning that is often life-saving to those who are incarcerated.

For the small monetary gain of removing these professionally trained library staff, the impacts on the incarcerated population are innumerable.

The professionally trained library staff develop high-quality, diverse, and responsive collections that respond to the complex information needs of the incarcerated population. There is also an obligation on the part of CSC to provide access to legal information for inmates and library staff help to meet that obligation. Importantly, library staff advocate for incarcerated Indigenous people in their right to access resources on Indigenous histories, cultures, languages, and materials about the impacts of colonialism.

The role of the librarian and professionally trained library staff cannot simply be replaced by CSC programming staff, or volunteers. Without internet or digital resources, the libraries in federal prisons are not a modern library model and without library staff, will not be a model to emulate at all.

There are numerous reports, guidelines, and research from Canada and around the world that point to the connection between literacy and reducing recidivism. This proposed move to

remove library staff from libraries will create only a room of books, not a space for learning, growth, problem-solving, and literacy.

I urge you to oppose this plan which is not fiscally, ethically, or educationally responsible, and to instead consult with librarians and library organizations.

Sincerely,