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ELECTIONS - MARCH 2025 - #107



HOW A WOULD-BE BOMBER REBUILT HIS LIFE

Zakaria Amara was jailed for his part in the Toronto 18 terror plot. Then came the hard work of redemption

By Michelle Shephard, *The Walrus*, Jan. 6, 2025

The email began: "I hope you're doing well and I hope this email does not cause you any anxiety. I really mean that."

The name attached to the November 8, 2023, message—Zakaria Amara—was one I had not thought about in years, but there was a time when I had spent hours studying him from afar. Amara was one of the leaders in the 2006 terrorism case where eighteen Muslim men and youth, four under the age of eighteen, were arrested for plotting to blow up downtown Toronto targets and a military base.

Back then, I was the Toronto Star's national security correspondent, and we covered the story extensively—weeks, months, years of ink. It was considered Canada's first large-scale "homegrown terrorism" plot, a term that took on new significance after the September 11, 2001, attacks to describe suspects who became violently radical without ever leaving their borders.

The plan went like this: two U-Haul trucks, each containing a one-tonne fertilizer bomb, would be parked in front of the targeted buildings during the morning rush hour. A third bomb would simultaneously hit a military base.

Although the accused came to be known collectively as the "Toronto 18," the group had broken into two factions after disagreements between some of the members. Amara, who was then a married twenty-year-old gas station attendant at Canadian Tire and a new father, called the shots for one of the groups. He appeared determined to act, and as police listened to him on wiretaps, he bragged that his attack was "gonna be kicking ass like never before."

Amara went so far as to build a detonator and buy what he thought was a truckload of explosives from an undercover informant. "To put this in context," Royal Canadian Mounted Police assistant commissioner Mike McDonnell said at the time of the arrests, "the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City that killed 168 people took one tonne of ammonium nitrate." McDonnell was wrong: it was actually a little over two tonnes. Amara had ordered three.

Like Amara, most of the accused were educated young Canadians who grew up in middle-class households. They were angered by the war in Iraq and Canada's involvement in Afghanistan, believing their actions would somehow convince Parliament to pull Canadian troops from the conflict.

But they were also far from a monolithic group and were motivated by a variety of personal reasons, spurred on by online propaganda. They were looking—perhaps Amara most of all—to escape their every-

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Published and Sent by PASAN

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Cell Count readers,

This issue of Cell Count is a little different from what you're used to. Normally, these pages are filled with your voices—your stories, your art, your poetry, and your experiences. And don't worry, that's not changing. If you sent something in, it will still be published in an upcoming issue. But right now, we've got something important to talk about: the election.

We know that getting solid, unbiased information inside isn't easy, especially when it comes to politics. That's why we've put together this special election issue—to break down what different parties are saying about issues that directly impact prisoners. Whether it's sentencing laws, parole, healthcare in prisons, or support after release, the decisions made by those in power affect your lives. And your vote? It matters.

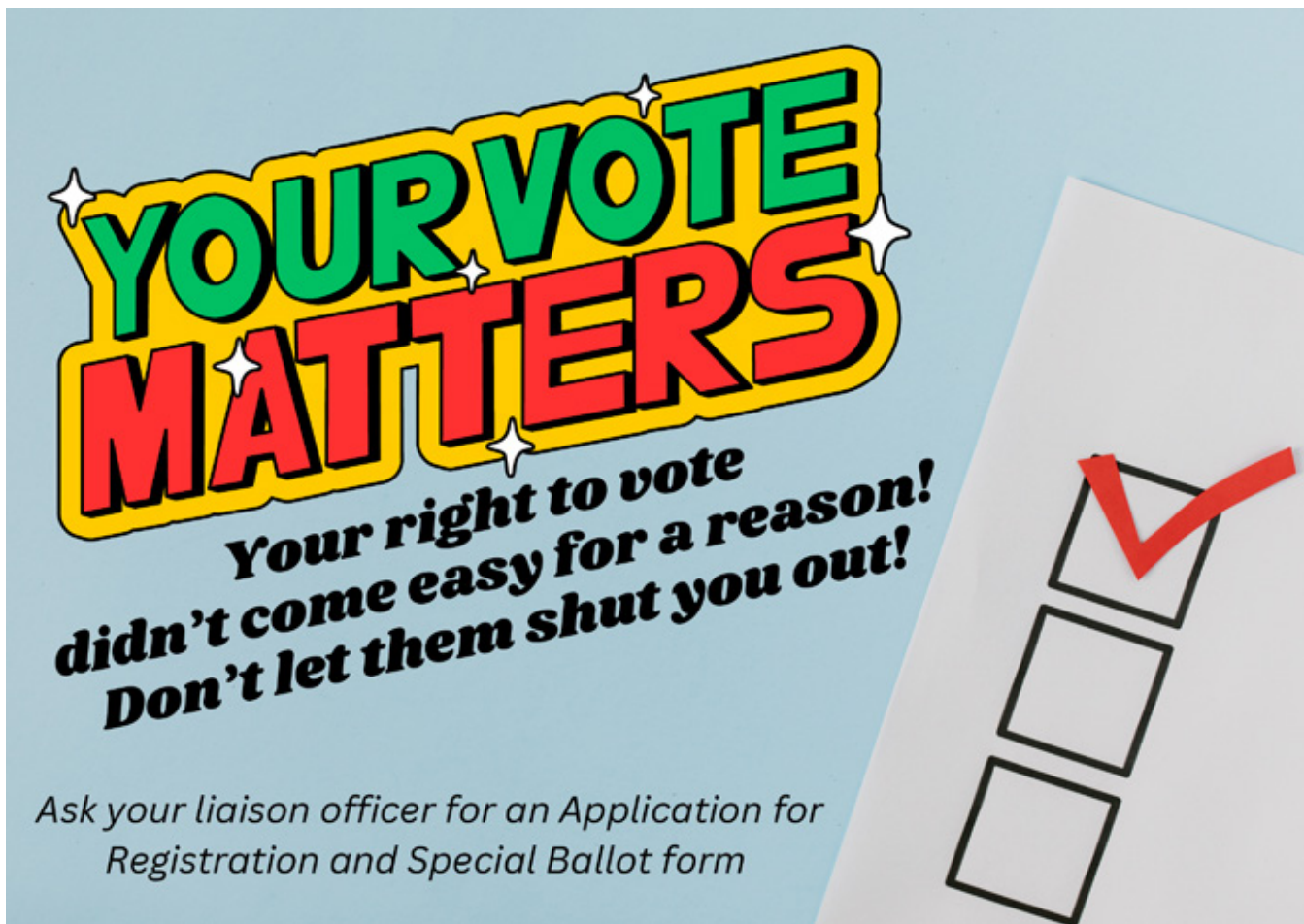
This issue wouldn't have been possible without the hard work of students from Dr. Syrus Marcus Ware's McMaster University graduate class, Prison Abolition, who researched party platforms and dug through policies to find out what politicians are actually saying—not just the usual campaign talk, but the stuff that impacts you. Another student spent time researching the history of voting rights in Canadian prisons and how to vote inside. A huge thank you to them for their dedication in putting this together. We also want to thank Senator Bernadette Clement for contributing an article about why your vote matters, and for all her hard work traveling to various prisons across the country to talk to you about voting.

And while we're talking about big things, this year marks the 30th anniversary of Cell Count. For three decades, this publication has been a space for people inside to speak their truth, share their creativity, and

connect with others. That's something worth celebrating. So, we want to hear from you—send in your reflections, artwork, stories, or anything you think speaks to what Cell Count has meant to you or could mean for the next 30 years. Let's make this anniversary issue something powerful.

For now, we hope this issue helps you feel informed and empowered. Whatever you do with your vote, know that your voice is valuable, your perspective is important, and your presence—inside or out—matters.

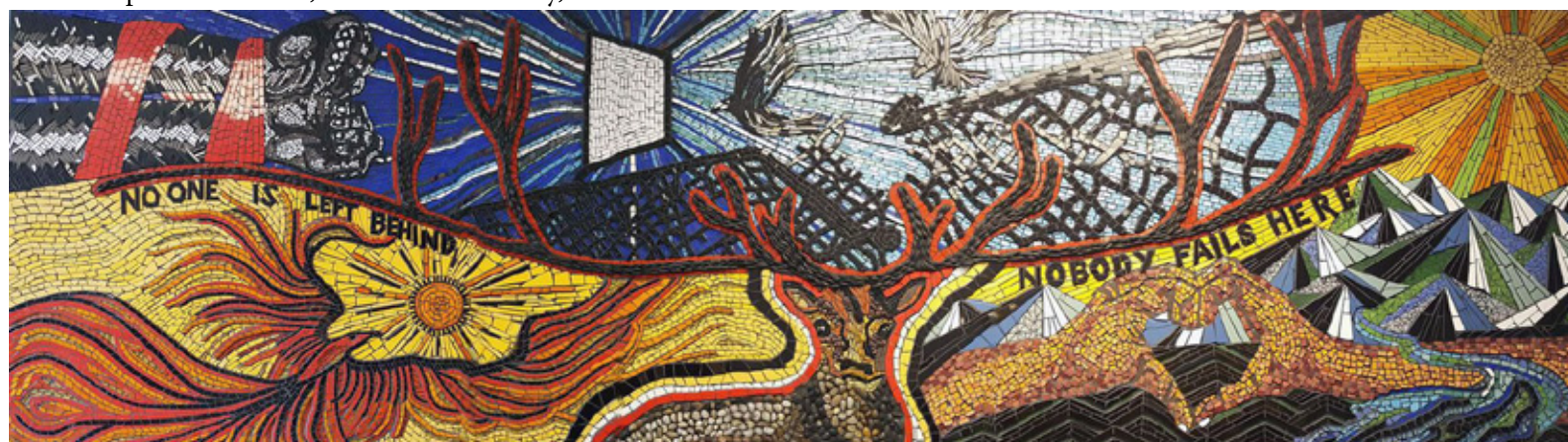
In solidarity,
Sena Hussain—Editor, Cell Count



YOUR VOTE MATTERS

Your right to vote didn't come easy for a reason!
Don't let them shut you out!

Ask your liaison officer for an Application for Registration and Special Ballot form



PASAN

PASAN is a community-based harm reduction/HIV/HCV organization that provides support, education and advocacy to prisoners and ex-prisoners. PASAN formed in 1991 as a grassroots response to the HIV crisis in the Canadian prison system. We strive to provide community development, education and support to prisoners and ex-prisoners in Ontario on HIV, Hepatitis C (HCV), overdose prevention and other harm reduction issues. Today, PASAN is the only community-based organization in Canada exclusively providing HIV and HCV prevention, education and support services to prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families.

SUPPORT SERVICES

- Individual support, informal counselling, case management, pre-release planning, and referrals for those in custody living with HIV and/or HCV
- We assist our clients in accessing

adequate medical care and support while incarcerated

- You can reach us via our toll free number at 1-866-224-9978. If you can't get through to us from our toll-free number, we also accept collect calls from prisoners across Canada at 416-920-9567, but we prefer people use our toll-free number
- Provide ongoing support, community development, resources and training for community groups across Ontario.

OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

- Conducts HIV/HCV and harm reduction workshops inside many of the provincial and federal adult institutions in Ontario
- Produces a newsletter, Cell Count, which contains article, poetry and art produced by current and ex-prisoners
- Facilitates Prison Life 101, HIV/HCV prevention and harm reduction/overdose prevention trainings for agencies working with prison populations
- Assist agencies to start prison in-

reach and support and act as a referral "hub" for HIV/HCV positive prisoners who are transferred from one region to another, to ensure continuity of support

- Peer health/harm reduction workers where ex-prisoners assist those who are currently incarcerated, about to be released, or already released to get medical and health needs met.

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ONTARIO COURT TO HEAR CHARTER CHALLENGE ON SUPERVISED CONSUMPTION SITE LAW

By The Canadian Press, March 24, 2025

The province passed legislation last year that banned consumption sites deemed too close to schools or daycares. The Neighbourhood Group, which runs the Kensington Market Overdose Prevention Site in downtown Toronto, launched a lawsuit in December along with two people who use the space.

"Safe consumption sites are not a perfect solution, but they are part of the solution," the group's lawyer, Carlo Di Carlo, said in an interview.

"It's something that will minimize deaths and the spread of infectious disease and that will allow people to continue their fight to recover. And so that's what's at stake for not only our individual applicants, but anybody else throughout Ontario who's in that position."

The group points to evidence that the 10 sites have never had

a death and have reversed several thousand overdoses.

The province is moving to an abstinence-based treatment model. Ten consumption sites will cease operations by April 1, when new rules take effect banning them within 200 metres of schools and daycares under the Community Care and Recovery Act.

Nine of those consumption sites will be converted to homelessness and addiction recovery treatment hubs, or HART hubs as the province refers to them. Ontario has also approved 18 new hubs across the province.

The province is investing \$529 million into the plan that includes 540 highly supportive housing units.

Public health officials and harm reduction workers have warned that overdoses, deaths and calls to emergency services will increase after the supervised consumption sites close. However, Health Minister Sylvia Jones said last summer that no one will die as a result of the policy shift.

The legal challenge being heard this week argues the new law violates both the Charter of

Rights and Freedoms and the Constitution, including the right to life, liberty and security of the person.

Closing supervised consumption sites violates that right by forcing people who use them to resort to unhealthy and unsafe drug consumption, which carries a higher risk of death from overdose and increases the risk of criminal prosecution, the challenge argues.

It also argues the legislation goes against the division of powers between Ottawa and provinces, in that only the federal government can make criminal law and try to suppress what it considers a "socially undesirable practice."

The government ordered reviews of 17 consumption sites across the province following the killing of a Toronto woman who was hit by a stray bullet in a shooting near one of the sites. Karolina Huebner-Makurat was walking through her southeast Toronto neighbourhood of Leslieville on July 7, 2023, when she was shot as a fight broke out between three alleged drug dealers outside the South Riverdale

Community Health Centre.

The province argues in a document filed in court that there is increased crime and disorder in the immediate vicinity of supervised consumption sites and that the sites themselves attract drug dealers. It points to eyewitness accounts from people who live and work near the sites as proof of the chaos.

"These eyewitnesses testified about the instances of drug trafficking, public drug use, public intoxication, aggression and violence, and discarded needles and other drug paraphernalia either immediately adjacent to or within one or two blocks of a (supervised consumption site)," lawyers for the province wrote.

They cite examples of an elementary school near one consumption site that went into lockdown one day while someone injected drugs in the schoolyard, as well as a child who accidentally pricked herself with a discarded needle and had to be monitored and tested for communicable diseases.

The applicants are seeking an injunction that would put off the April 1 site closures until court can decide the case. Ultimately, they want the law struck down.

The province said the application should be dismissed.

The case has attracted several interveners the court will hear from. That includes neighbours of some of the consumption sites, the Leslieville Neighbours For Community Safety and the Niagara Neighbours for Community Safety.

They say there is much fear in the community.

"Children living near the (supervised consumption site) at the Riverdale Community Health Centre have found baggies of fentanyl and discarded needles," the groups said.

"They have witnessed drug deals, which have triggered panic attacks because they are afraid of getting shot, like Ms. Huebner-Makurat."

The groups say the law should be upheld.

The City of Toronto's board of health has also intervened, as has the HIV Legal Network, Aboriginal Legal Services and the Black Legal Action Centre, among others.

"The Board anticipates the effect of reducing access to harm reduction services in Toronto in the middle of a drug toxicity crisis will be severe: more people will overdose and die," the board of health wrote in court documents.

"This is a very high cost for achieving the legislative objective of the (law)."

Opioid deaths began increasing in Ontario in 2015 when illicit fentanyl first hit the province's streets. Deaths spiked during the COVID-19 pandemic and in 2023, the last full year of available coroner's data, more than 2,600 Ontarians died from opioids.

The deaths hit all demographics, but opioid fatalities are disproportionately affecting the province's increasing homeless population.

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario has estimated that more than 80,000 people in the province were homeless last year and that \$11 billion over 10 years would be required to end chronic homelessness.

This report by The Canadian Press was first published March 24, 2025.

Liam Casey, The Canadian Press

INVOLUNTARY CARE ALREADY EXISTS IN BC, BUT IS IT WORKING?

Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), British Columbia

VANCOUVER, BC - (September 18, 2024): On September 15, 2024, Premier Eby announced that his government is expanding involuntary care for people with brain injury, mental illness, and severe addiction. Included in this announcement are the addition of more than 400 hospital-based mental health beds and two new secure care facilities - one for those involved in the criminal justice system and another for those apprehended under the Mental Health Act, also located on the grounds of a



We are in a death crisis

SAVE OUR SITES

save our lives

330 UNIVERSITY AVE. COURTROOM 8-2

MARCH 24

9:30 START TIME FOR HEARING (INSIDE COURT ROOM SUPPORT)

12:00 ARRIVAL FOR RALLY

RALLY TO SUPPORT THE CHARTER CHALLENGE TO SAVE OUR SITES

DISABILITY JUSTICE NETWORK of ONTARIO

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with a new line for Kingston! 613-881-0050

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report prison conditions, extended lockdowns, or issues accessing medical/psych care

request support, resources

Prisoner Support Lines

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Niagara	905-227-5066
Milton/GTA	416-775-7983
London/West	519-690-0836
Kingston	613-881-0050
Ottawa/East	613-768-9951
Kenora/North	807-548-4312

DISABILITY JUSTICE NETWORK of ONTARIO

correctional facility.

Other than adding more psychiatric beds and creating specific facilities, the announcement earlier this week regarding involuntary care doubles down on an existing approach to involuntary care by the Government of BC, where significant legal powers already exist under the Mental Health Act.

There are around 30,000 Mental Health Act apprehensions of around 20,000 individuals each year in BC, which is the highest rate of all provinces in Canada. [1] Over the last two decades, there has been a dramatic increase in reliance on involuntary services, while voluntary services have not kept up with demand. [2] Despite historic investments by the Government of BC in the last number of years, we know that barriers remain to on-demand voluntary care for both mental health and substance use services.

People with substance use disorder are the fastest growing population being detained under BC's Mental Health Act, yet this is not commonly known. [3] This fact, along with the recent announcement, is concerning to CMHA BC, knowing that there is a lack of evidence to support the effectiveness of involuntary treatment for people with substance use disorder, and that existing evidence actually suggests that involuntary treatment leads to an increased risk of death due to drug poisoning upon release. [4,5] The reality is that we are already relying heavily on involuntary care without really examining whether it is effective.

There is a striking opportunity to examine gaps and failings in services before and after involuntary care to determine what is going wrong. Those seeking voluntary services report significant closed doors to care and subsequently do not get the care they need at the right time. For those who have experienced involuntary care, there have been concerning accounts out of psychiatric wards across the province, including the inappropriate use of restraints and seclusion rooms, the coercive use of sedation and a lack of trauma-informed care that has led to further trauma. Our partner Health Justice just released a report focused on distressing accounts of gender-based violence experienced during involuntary care.

Despite these worrying trends, there remains very little oversight or accountability of the mental health system. CMHA BC is concerned that a movement to detain more people under these current conditions and culture, without addressing significant gaps in the quality and effectiveness of care, will not lead to positive or dignified outcomes for people. BC's Representative for Children and Youth and the BC Ombudsperson have each recently issued systemic investigation reports documenting serious concerns about the administration of BC's Mental Health Act and the associated impacts, including on young people.

We agree that all communities must be safe and free from violence. A community is safer when people can access the support they need to be well, when and where they need it. We acknowledge that involuntary care may be a needed last resort for those at extreme risk of harm to themselves or others, but it must be just that – a last resort, not a sweeping solution. While there are a small number of people with more serious mental health and substance use conditions that are at elevated risk of violence, this risk is the result of the failure of many systems to support these individuals before they reach a point of crisis.

We must examine recent extreme examples to understand where systems have failed so we can focus on prevention and early intervention in the future. Without addressing root causes and interrogating the gaps and failings of the current system, even with involuntary care, people will be released back into community without the necessary supports needed to help them on their journey to wellness. The cycle will continue.

Should the next Government move forward with the plans announced earlier this week, we strongly urge them to:

Critically examine gaps and failings before the use of involuntary care

Improve the oversight and quality of involuntary care to move from an over-reliance on containment to proper dignified and humane care, and

Demonstrate to the public that the BC Mental Health Act is fit for purpose.

In line with our recently released Policy and Advocacy Roadmap, should the next Government move to re-open the Mental Health Act in the next legislative session, we strongly urge them to immediately establish a comprehensive review of the Mental Health Act under the Public Inquiry Act. This would be led by an independent commissioner and staff, to ensure legislative amendments are grounded in evidence, human rights, and lived expertise. Our hope is that this public inquiry could lead to the establishment of a long-term mental health commissioner for future oversight and accountability.

There have been historic investments in the mental health and substance use system, to the tune of \$2.65 billion since 2017. We cannot stop this momentum and need to do more to ensure there is a robust network of on-demand voluntary care, so we call on the next BC Government to close the gap in access to voluntary community-based mental health services, raise the bar in the quality of mental health services and respond with care to those experiencing a crisis.

Footnotes:

1. Wyton, M. (2021, November 23). BC forced mental health treatment spikes. The Tyee. <https://thetyee.ca/News/2021/11/23/BC-Forced-Mental-Health-Treatment-Spikes/>

2. Loyal, J. P., Laverigne, M. R., Shirmaleki, M., Fischer, B., Kaoser, R., Makolewski, J., & Small, W. (2023). Trends in Involuntary Psychiatric Hospitalization in British Columbia: Descriptive Analysis of Population-Based Linked Administrative Data from 2008 to 2018. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 68(4), 257-268. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08919133231188888>

PIERRE POILIEVRE'S PIPE DREAM: IMPRISON DRUG USERS FOR LIFE

Just about every sale of fentanyl would apply, clogging our justice system. Time for a logic check.

By Mo Amir, *The Tyee*, Feb 11, 2025

In December 2022, Conservative Party of Canada Leader Pierre Poilievre wrote in a National Post op-ed, "People struggling with addiction belong in treatment, not prison." Last week, he unashamedly called for many of those same people to be imprisoned for life.

It was a stunning culmination of Poilievre's opposition to drug decriminalization and harm reduction policies, including supervised consumption sites (which Poilievre referred to as "drug dens") and prescribed alternative drug programs.

What started as concern that current drug policy "lacked a path to a full recovery" devolved into Poilievre branding harm reduction as "wacko policy" and falsely blaming harm reduction for drug deaths in British Columbia. (The toxic, unregulated composition of illicit street drugs is responsible for the country's drug deaths.)

Stumping across the country, Poilievre repeatedly promised to "fund treatment and recovery," giving the illusion, at least, that his party views drug use and addiction through a lens of health care, not criminal justice.

That illusion shattered when Poilievre proposed mandatory life imprisonment for "fentanyl kingpins."

40 mg is less than half of a baby Aspirin

As soon as the sloganeering unveiled a policy proposal, Pierre Poilievre's mask slipped.

Under Poilievre's plan, "anyone caught trafficking, producing, or exporting over 40 mg of fentanyl" would receive a mandatory life sentence in prison.

This 40-milligram threshold is a mere 1.6 per cent of the 2.5 grams that someone can possess under British Columbia's decriminalization pilot project. For context, 40 milligrams is less than half of a typical baby Aspirin tablet.

When applied to a weight of 40 milligrams, "trafficking" — the sale, distribution, administration or transfer of drugs under Canada's Controlled Drugs and Substances Act — becomes problematic given how fentanyl is sold and consumed on a street level.

As harm reduction advocate Zoë Dodd noted, fentanyl is generally sold on the streets in 100-milligram increments.

"If you're talking about Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, fen-

tanyl users are using a quarter gram [250 milligrams] or more a day," according to Guy Felicella, a harm reduction and recovery advocate.

"There are always hand-to-hand transactions, from dealers to drug users to other drug users. It's a constant exchange in the Downtown Eastside. It's pretty common for people to pool their money to buy from a dealer and then those drugs get distributed."

These hand-to-hand exchanges constitute trafficking, which would — under the proposed policy — subject every habitual fentanyl user to a punishment of life in prison.

The very same people that Pierre Poilievre promised to "bring home" drug-free are now, by Poilievre's own definition, "fentanyl kingpins" who should be imprisoned for life.

"Pretty much every drug user on the street would be going to jail for life," said Felicella.

This Conservative policy marks an all-out "war on drugs" approach to permanently incarcerate drug users, which is inconsistent with Poilievre's promise to provide drug users with treatment and recovery services.

It is also impractical.

An unserious proposal Mandatory minimum sentence policies have been overturned by the Supreme Court of Canada, which in 2021 determined that appropriate sentencing for fentanyl trafficking is eight to 15 years. However, Poilievre has suggested that if his criminal laws are struck down by the Supreme Court, he will use the notwithstanding clause to "make them constitutional."

Setting aside the Constitution of Canada, which Poilievre seems prepared to disregard himself, Poilievre's proposal requires a massive investment in the staffing and capacity of Canadian courts.

Charges under Canada's Controlled Drugs and Substances Act are prosecuted by the Public Prosecution Service of Canada, or PPSC. The PPSC must navigate through the same backlogs, staffing shortages and limited courtroom spaces that have plagued Canadian courts and resulted in many criminal charges being stayed.

The wide net cast by Poilievre's policy would dramatically exacerbate these backlogs. It would need to be accompanied by billions of dollars of investment to expand the capacities of Canada's criminal justice system.

Otherwise, according to Vancouver criminal defence lawyer Kyla Lee, Poilievre's proposal will bog down the courts far more than just the simple addition of more cases.

"The more you increase mandatory minimum sentences and the higher they are, the more you motivate an accused person to pursue every possible angle and argument in their defence. The result of that is that you take a trial that could ordinarily be completed in a day or two and turn it into a multi-week marathon, all over a personal-use amount of fentanyl," Lee said.

Since Poilievre's proposed fentanyl trafficking charges carry a mandatory life sentence, the accused can elect to be tried in provincial court or Supreme Court.

An accused is incentivized to be tried in Supreme Court so that they can request a preliminary inquiry, whereby a provincial court judge screens the evidence to determine if it is sufficient to commit the accused to trial. The Crown can bypass this procedure by using the direct indictment process to take a case directly to the Supreme Court. However, given the limited Supreme Court sitting locations, it would not be feasible to prosecute every fentanyl case — especially under Poilievre's definition of "trafficking" — by direct indictment.

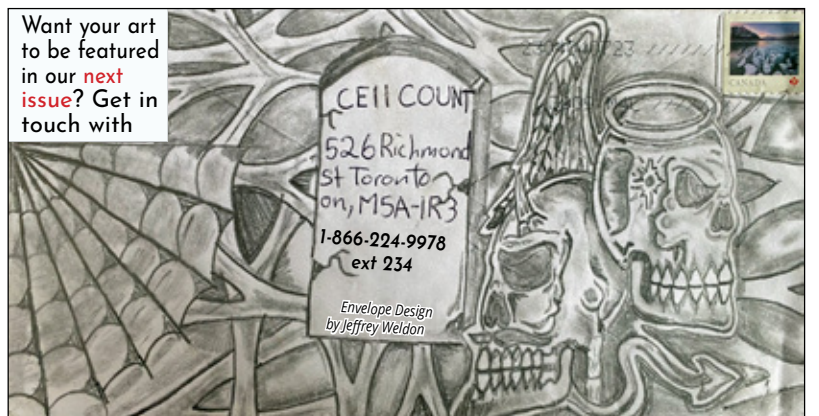
Even if a case makes it past a preliminary inquiry, the limited Supreme Court sitting locations — again — make the inundation of new cases even more difficult to try within a reasonable time (30 months).

"Our courts would end up flooded with so many prosecutions that it would be untenable for the cases to proceed within a reasonable time," said Lee.

Consequently, despite the extensive use of public resources, many trafficking charges under Poilievre's proposal would be stayed.

So long as "fentanyl trafficking" is ridiculously defined by such a low threshold of 40 milligrams, the Conservative leader's policy is, in practical terms, moot.

Effectively, Poilievre's proposal demonstrates such a fundamental misunderstanding of Canada's criminal justice system, street-level drug trade and his own promise to provide addictions treatment that it lacks not only logic, but any semblance of seriousness.



day lives for something more meaningful.

Journalists showed up from all over Canada, the US, and beyond to attend the suspects' bail hearings in Brampton, and anyone who had a long beard or hijab had a microphone shoved in their face. Globe and Mail columnist Christie Blatchford wrote at the time that the accused "have first names like Mohamed, middle names like Mohamed and last names like Mohamed."

Four years, many hearings, and hundreds of articles later, seven of the eighteen accused walked free, including three of the youths, who had their charges stayed. Another four had gone to trial and were found guilty. The remaining seven, including Amara, decided to plead guilty. In 2022, after nearly seventeen years behind bars, including years of solitary confinement and a lengthy stint at Canada's most violent penitentiary, Amara was granted parole.

I was surprised to hear from him. The media's coverage of the Toronto 18 case had been criticized in some quarters—not unfairly—for being sensational, and I assumed he'd want nothing to do with reporters. I replied the day after receiving his email. I told him that, after two decades at the Star, I'd left the newspaper in 2018 to focus more on documentary filmmaking, podcasts, and longer features but that I'd be happy to have a coffee. I was genuinely curious about how he was doing, how prison had shaped him.

We agreed to meet on the campus of Toronto Metropolitan University. I was running a few minutes late, so I sent him a text. "Got us prime real estate," he wrote back. "Going to find a spot to pray. Brb." As I waited in line for coffee, I spotted what I assumed was his unattended bag at a table by the window. Just minutes later, he came back looking distraught and apologizing profusely for how that must have appeared—a convicted terrorist leaving an unattended bag! I laughed and confessed the thought hadn't even crossed my mind, which obviously made me a terrible national security correspondent. Throughout that first conversation, he seemed contrite, regretful, thoughtful, and pretty funny.

But I still had a journalist's skepticism. He was a convicted terrorist and had been described by police as persuasive and manipulative. I wanted to believe he was a changed man—but was he?

For months after—as texts, emails, and coffee talks became regular—Amara shared stories of his new life back on the outside, and I got to know him better. He got a bike and would ride around Toronto on his days off work, relishing his freedom. His written correspondence had a lot of smiling emojis and exclamation points. But it was clear he had to work hard for that optimism as he also wraps himself in the guilt of lives ruined—not just his but those of his co-accused, friends, relatives, and especially his

daughter. The more we talked, the harder it became not to want to write about him—to write the sequel. I knew he had a good story to tell, but I think it was something more than that.

Because what Amara really seeks is something he cannot control: redemption. And if he was indeed "rehabilitated," I wanted to help him get it.

When Amara pleaded guilty in 2010, he tearfully addressed the court: "I spent days upon days trying to summon words appropriate, meaningful, and deep enough to express my regret and seek forgiveness for my actions," he told Justice Bruce Durno. "I would like to promise you and my fellow Canadians that I will use my sentence to change myself from a man of destruction to a man of construction. I promise, no matter how long it takes."

But Amara's path toward repentance wasn't straightforward. His first three years in pre-trial custody were spent in solitary confinement in Milton's Maplehurst Correctional Facility and Toronto's Don Jail, where, he says, he became only more extreme in his views—determined to avenge the Muslim lives lost in the conflicts that followed the 9/11 attacks.

"There was a moment when I actually wanted to write, almost like a manifesto, condemning the process, condemning the government, condemning the war in Afghanistan, condemning the US, like just using that as a platform," he says. He had planned to read that statement in court. But when he tried to write, he struggled to explain himself—to justify what he had planned. "I just couldn't write a coherent piece." That was the first small crack.

Soon after, he was transferred into the general population at the Don Jail, where he had some challenging conversations. There was a Jewish inmate, and they debated Palestine. There was a former soldier who said he had fought in the war in Afghanistan and held some nuanced views. And there was a banker from Bay Street whose brothers worked in the Toronto Stock Exchange, which had been one of the group's targets. The banker was "more of a potential victim than anybody else, and seeing him and interacting with him made me reconsider. If somebody shows me that I'm wrong, I am willing to accept it," Amara later told the court at his sentencing.

But when I ask Amara if he had really altered his views, he pauses and then says, "You know when there's issues of domestic violence and the husband or the boyfriend feels awful? And he says 'I'm sorry' but he hasn't really dealt with the core issues. You just feel sorry in that moment. Right?" In other words, to use therapy speak, Amara had not yet "done the work."

That would come, he says, after he was given a life sentence and transferred to Quebec's Special Handling Unit, or the SHU. The SHU, in Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, is Canada's most restrictive detention centre and is often referred to as the "last resort" for

inmates who pose a risk so high that they cannot be managed in a regular maximum-security institution.

Amara was devastated to be transferred to a place he described as a "den of lions," home to inmates who had committed violence not just on the outside but while incarcerated as well. "You have to remember that, except for the terrorism cases, everybody is there because they are, in prison lingo, 'established,'" Amara says. "You reach the end of the day and you're just so relieved. Ten thirty is when everything is locked up and shuts down. All you can think is, 'I made it,' but then you remember, 'I have to do it again tomorrow.'"

Amara was told he was there to be assessed. He ended up staying for six years. As the months dragged on—and without any type of therapy or rehabilitation—he relapsed. Amara said he became paranoid (in 2011, he even threw scalding water on another inmate), stopped talking to his parole officer, and smashed his TV. He witnessed an inmate get stabbed repeatedly and other crimes he says he has trouble talking about and would rather just forget.

In the summer of 2014, he began to obsess about the terror group ISIS fighting against the Syrian regime. "I was following the news and I'm even drawing maps, [charting] their progress, thinking, 'Look, the brothers are gaining territory,'" he says. "And 'Oh they're going to get me out,' you know? I was just delusional."

But when he started to hear reports of infighting between the groups and the scale of ISIS brutality, he began to doubt his own beliefs. "When you're serving a life sentence, you hold on to the cause, as it's the only way to give meaning to the suffering," he says. Ideologically, he still supported al-Qaeda's opposition to the West and thought ISIS was just an extension of this group. But when ISIS began to break free from its al-Qaeda roots and declared its caliphate, Amara didn't know what to believe anymore.

One night, he heard a BBC radio report about militants fighting each other—fifty dead.

Then came graphic accounts of hostages and suspected spies being beheaded, followed by mosque attacks, as the death toll steadily rose. He said he was especially struck by the murders of British aid worker Alan Henning and American journalist Jim Foley, both beheaded by ISIS. And he was horrified by the burning of Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kaseasbeh, which he saw as a perversion of his religion, since there are explicit prophetic texts prohibiting the killing of anyone with fire.

Over the period of about a year, he slowly became overwhelmed by the horror of it all and doubted his "cause" and his faith. "They were upping the ante of how savage they could be." Amara felt something break. So he started to write it all down.

In the years after 9/11, the bulk of my reporting had focused more on abuses of power than impending terror threats. I investigated the detention and torture of Canadians Maher Arar, Abdullah Almalki, Muayyed Nureddin, Ahmad Abou-Elmaati, and Omar Khadr. Eventually, the federal government would offer the five men an apology for Canada's role in their wrongful imprisonment in Syria, Egypt, and Guantanamo Bay and pay out more than \$50 million in settlements.

In late 2005, though, I began receiving tips of a different kind. A security source alerted me to a suspicious gun-smuggling arrest at the border, and I had reports from community contacts that various young people were under surveillance. There was a lot of chatter and fear, but I wasn't yet sure what I was investigating. Some of the tips hinted at a very real threat to Toronto's safety. Others warned it was another case of law enforcement overreach in the name of national security.

What I didn't realize was that, once I started investigating what would turn out to be the Toronto 18 case, I was inadvertently setting off tripwires. Some of my calls were picked up as police were listening in. I even knocked on the door of one of Amara's co-accused, whose name I learned from a source connected with the gun-smuggling operation.

Then came a warning a few months later—nothing official, nothing on paper, but a phone call from someone I knew in the federal government who said the RCMP was not happy with my probing. I was told: "You are making a lot of asses clench in Ottawa."

The message was that if the Star wrote about the investigation before the arrests and something happened, the cops would happily hold a press conference and blame us. At the time, I didn't have a story yet, and I think my editors were growing a little impatient with my digging. But now we knew something was coming, and this case became my full-time assignment.

On the night of June 2, 2006, my backyard was filled with Star journalists for an annual summer barbecue we used to hold (my husband is also a journalist with the newspaper). More than sixty summer interns, reporters, photographers, and editors were crammed into our small yard, beers and burgers in hand.

I suspected arrests in the case would be coming any day, but I had no idea when. When my cellphone rang with an unknown number, I remember looking at the photo editor, who was tending the barbecue. Surely it couldn't be now? It was around 8 p.m. on a Friday evening. "Pre-dawn raids" is a cliché for a reason—most arrests happen in the early hours, when suspects are home and asleep.

A source was on the phone. "It's going down" was all they said. Within minutes, our backyard had emptied out. Reporters

and photographers were dispatched east, west, and north of Toronto as I headed to the newsroom to pull the story together. By 9 p.m., we had a bare-bones version of the story online. At 9:16 p.m., the RCMP sent out a vague press release stating there would be a news conference the next morning.

By 5 a.m. on June 3, we had more than 5,500 words online. I was proud of our reporting, and while the coverage seemed sensational, the case was sensational. Over 400 police officers from across Ontario—including Toronto's Emergency Task Force squad and canine unit—made the arrests in a series of dramatic takedowns Friday night and into the early hours of Saturday. We had no way of knowing yet if the allegations were true, and we could build profiles of the suspects based only on what we were told.

But the fear the case stoked, and some of the Islamophobic coverage that followed, was disturbing. A right-wing blog calling our coverage a triumph of "beat reporting over political correctness" made me feel queasy.

The case also prompted then prime minister Stephen Harper to enact a new law that revoked the Canadian citizenship of those convicted of terrorism who were born outside of Canada. Amara, who was born in Jordan but grew up in Mississauga, Ontario, was the first citizen to be stripped of his passport under this new ruling. The law later became a contentious topic of debate during the 2015 election when Justin Trudeau famously argued against two-tiered citizenship, decrying, "A Canadian is a Canadian." Once prime minister, he repealed the law, and Amara's citizenship was reinstated.

The Star followed the trials vigorously—my colleague Isabel Teotonio spent years documenting the hearings for a lengthy series. The cases were complicated: the allegations against each of the accused differed in terms of their involvement, and there was controversy about the influence of undercover operatives. Despite the severity of the allegations, some of the details of the cases seemed more farcical than fanatical. There was, for example, the so-called training camp that Amara and one of his co-accused organized in the snowy woods north of Toronto, involving about a dozen recruits (including an undercover operative) marching around the forest, watching videos, and making grandiose statements.

At a memorable preliminary hearing for one of the fifteen-year-old suspects, lawyer Nadir Sachak inquired about his client's survival training:

Q: It appeared that you guys were going to Tim Hortons or a doughnut shop on a regular basis?

A: Tim Hortons, yes.

Q: Tim Hortons, and this—to what, drink coffee?

A: Yes.

Q: And what, to use...

A: To use the...

Q: ...the washroom?

A: Facilities, yeah.

Q: What, number one and number two?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: So, like, where would you guys go to do a number one at the camp?

A: Anywhere, really. I mean there were general areas where you would go, and it was known that people would, you know, use facilities accordingly over there.

Q: Okay, number two?

A: No, you had to go to the Timmy's.

Q: So you had to basically...

A: Wait.

Q: Hold it until the evening every night?

A: Oh, yeah, two, three days even. Depending. There were, I don't want to say shifts, but...

Q: All right, so basically the trips to Tim Hortons were to take a dump and to eat some food?

A: Yeah.

I felt sorry for those who were acquitted or had their charges stayed. Being called a terrorist, especially in the fearful decade that followed the 9/11 attacks, was a label that is impossible to shake.

After the arrests, I spent much of the next decade reporting from abroad—an incredible beat that allowed me to follow the stories from the halls of power where foreign policies take flight to the conflict zones where they land. All too often, I'd discover that something enacted in the name of protecting national security would do just the opposite. An errant drone strike that hits a wedding party not only doesn't kill terrorists—it inspires new ones.

In 2016, I was given a year-long fellowship to investigate "homegrown terrorism" and the counter-violent extremism—CVE—industry. My research pointed to two factors. First, this problem should not be left to law enforcement alone. No one wakes up a terrorist. There are many factors and stages that can last years before police are involved. And second, no deradicalization program can work without an intense one-on-one approach involving mentors who have credibility with vulnerable youths.

It made me think back to whether what happened in the Toronto 18 case was the best outcome—the millions spent investigating, the elaborate undercover operations, lives ruined, not just of the accused but also their families and friends, and the spread of Islamophobia that the arrests generated.

Had there been programs or other options available back in 2006, could those accused have been deradicalized? Could Amara have been diverted instead of arrested?

Language has been at the centre of Amara's case from the start. As a teenager, he had a blog where he'd opine about his growing anti-Western views, at one point complaining about not being able to persuade some friends. "Trying to convince these

people is like trying to subdue the Mercury Guy from Terminator 2, impossible. Unless we can get some liquid Nitrogen that is (CSIS, I was just joking)." CSIS took note.

And then, after his arrest, it was my language, along with that of others in the media, that established his public profile as a terrorist. I looked back at the stories we wrote when Amara was first arrested—beginning that June 3 morning under the headline "Terror Cops Swoop." As opposed to many of the columns, the stories were straightforward: this is what is being alleged, this is what people are saying, "none of the allegations have been proven in court."

But, of course, even these news stories contained some of the "war on terror" platitudes that politicians and analysts loved and would convict suspects in the court of public opinion. A day after the arrests, with details about the accused still unfolding, Harper told reporters, "As at other times in our history, we are a target because of who we are and how we live, our society, our diversity, and our values—values such as freedom, democracy, and the rule of law—the values that make Canada great, values that Canadians cherish."

Once Amara had his revelation about ISIS, he began to rewrite his narrative. And once he started, he couldn't stop writing.

In 2015, Amara was transferred from the SHU to Millhaven Institution, a less restrictive maximum-security facility in Bath, Ontario. It was here, a couple years later, that he met Sena Hussain during a prison "health fair," where different organizations set up booths for inmates to browse. Hussain produces and edits a magazine called Cell Count, which goes to all federal, and some provincial, prisons across Canada and publishes the writing, poetry, and artwork created by inmates for inmates.

Hussain encouraged Amara to submit his writings. She was so impressed by one story entitled "The Boy and His Sandcastle" that she ran it on the magazine's cover. Amara writes about his upbringing (including a sexual assault in his youth), his path to radicalization, the impact of his imprisonment, and, eventually, his enlightenment. "It is said that those who are the most dogmatic are usually the least certain," Amara writes. "A vivid depiction of this internal struggle is that of a boy who is perpetually fortifying the walls of a sandcastle he built too close to the waves."

"Prior to ISIS, whenever innocent people were killed, I would simply tell myself that it was 'collateral damage' if those killed were non-Muslims, or a 'mistake' if they were Muslims," he wrote. "Every atrocity committed by ISIS was like a Tsunami that would violently demolish my Sand Castle and leave no trace of it behind. Yet I kept frantically rushing back to rebuild it."

When he could no longer justify what he once thought was righteous, he worried that he would also have to abandon

his faith. In his mind, his radical ideology was connected to his religion. When he finally accepted that they were not, he says, he experienced a "spiritual ascent."

Gordon Darrall, a retired elementary school teacher who met Amara when he volunteered at a prison book club at Millhaven, says he was "stunned" by the piece. "He did not fit my image of a terrorist leader," Darrall recalls. "He wasn't very black and white at all in his views." Reading and writing, and supporters like Hussain, is what Darrall credits for Amara's transformation. "He had to basically find his own way to changing his attitudes in prison. The correction services did not do very much to support that at all," he says. When I ask Amara about it, he calls it self-administered therapy. "When you abandon an ideology, an extremist ideology, it leaves, like, a void." Reading and writing filled that, to some extent.

Writing-as-therapy was a sentiment I could understand. I always find I can express myself more clearly in writing, as opposed to talking. Years ago, I sat down to write about my experiences with infertility just to try to process them—to try to alleviate the sadness. I ended up publishing the column in the Star, thinking it may help others who feel alone in their struggles—but that had not been my intention in going public. I just needed to quiet the noise in my head.

Amara's sister, Dena, says she noticed the change in her brother once he began to write regularly. In Millhaven, she was allowed her first private visit with him, without a Plexiglas barrier. Dena says they began having the "most straightforward" conversations they had had since his arrest nearly a decade earlier. "He had really reached that point of confronting his truth and not lying to himself," she says.

With his permission, she created a Facebook account under his name to post his stories and poems for a wider audience. Amara still seemed to crave a purpose that was bigger than himself. The profile featured a photo of him holding pen to paper, alongside pictures of him with signs professing his love for his mother and daughter. Among the stories she posted was "The Boy and His Sandcastle."

But six months later, in the summer of 2018, a reporter at Global TV discovered the profile, and an hour after calling Facebook for comment, the account was shut down. "We don't allow mass murderers to maintain a presence on Facebook," the company told Global.

Phil Gurski, a former Canadian Security Intelligence Service analyst during the Toronto 18 investigation, wrote a blog post about the whole episode. For Gurski, Amara showed "a distinct lack of ownership" by blaming his actions on "a perfect storm of internal and external influences." Gurski contended he had alternatives to violent extremism. "You had a choice," he wrote. "None of this is anyone's fault but yours. Accept that."

Amara was stung by the claim that he was ducking responsibility. "That's exactly what I was trying to do in my writing," he says. "It was really devastating."

Amara was the last of the Toronto 18 suspects to get parole two years ago. Aside from one of his co-accused, who left Canada for Syria in 2013 and died fighting, the rest have reportedly gone on to live quiet lives. One of the men now practises law.

Days before Amara turned thirty-nine last August, he had his parole extended for another six months (at the end of which it will be reviewed again). He must continue to live at a halfway house and abide by other conditions, which include seeking permission for his outings. He's still restricted from unsupervised access to the internet or possessing electronic devices such as a smartphone. He bangs out texts old school, tapping the numbers for letters on his Easyfone (advertised online as "mobiles for senior citizens"), and he recently purchased a word processor so he could keep writing. Amara self-published a collection of his writings, which he dedicated to his sister, under the title *A Boy and His Sandcastle*. Last fall, he began a creative writing continuing education course at the University of Toronto.

Amara also works five days a week at a watch repair shop and as an occasional consultant for Estimated Time of Arrival. ETA is a counter-violent extremism program that began in 2020 and is housed in Yorktown Family Services, a mental health centre. It's the kind of program my fellowship research showed was direly needed. It's the kind of program Amara says he wishes he could have accessed when he was twenty.

David O'Brien is ETA's director and comes from a background of three decades working in the mental health field. He says, in around 2016, he started to notice more youths coming into their programs being "openly hateful." A few years later, the Toronto police approached his centre with a case of a youth who wanted to shoot up his school on behalf of Hitler—could they intervene? Soon, other cases were referred by police (some likely from CSIS but channelled through law enforcement).

"We knew nothing at the time about the CVE sector," O'Brien says. But the cases went well. "It's not sexy," O'Brien says of the program. "We just wrap services around people and identify all the vulnerabilities that led them to these hate communities, to this terrorism or extremism." That means helping them with health issues or mental health therapy, or helping them find employment, education, or housing. Essentially, what O'Brien and his team provide is a community.

What they rarely do, O'Brien says, is talk ideology. "When I talk to parents and others, the first thing is they want to pound the ideology out of their kids and their loved ones, right?" O'Brien told me. "But that's the worst

thing you can do; it actually reinforces the radicalization." Sometimes, O'Brien says, the ideology is all their clients have to cling to. Just as Amara explains in his writing, that's the hardest part to let go—that supposed sense of purpose and a higher calling.

O'Brien is not able to discuss any one case, Amara's included, but he believes, thanks to ETA's success in the past five years, that it is less likely today to see expansive, labour-intensive criminal cases such as the Toronto 18, which involved nearly two years of intelligence and undercover operations. "Police had no other tool than arrests," he says about the years after 9/11. Now law enforcement and security officials regularly refer people to ETA before their actions can become criminal. Cases these days include a worrying number of young people with white supremacist and neo-Nazi views. In the past four years, the centre has had nearly 300 participants in their program.

O'Brien is especially pleased with the recent uptick in clients who have come to them not from police but thanks to the advice of relatives, teachers, or friends. "We're trying to get everyone on board to keep their eyes and ears open," O'Brien says. "Nobody just blows up. Nobody just shoots up a school; there are signs. Many weeks and years of signs leading up to this. I think, if we have more awareness, we can start intervening."

There are no programs similar to ETA inside prisons—which is one of the reasons Amara was denied parole the first time he went before the board in 2021. "They wanted me to show I had enrolled in a program that didn't exist."

The board members noted this long-standing problem in their written decision. "In the absence of validated risk tools that can objectively and accurately assess your risk of violent recidivism in the area of terrorist activity, and in the absence of any counselling or programming that is designed to help you develop strategies to mitigate your risk, the Board is challenged to make an assessment of your risk and readiness for release." The members did credit Amara for his own efforts and "self-management" but denied his application.

Trying to prepare him for his next attempt at parole, Hussain, Cell Count editor, reached out to ETA on his behalf. Amara says O'Brien visited him at Warkworth Penitentiary, the medium-security prison in Campbellford, Ontario, where he had been transferred after Millhaven, and later conducted one-on-one telephone sessions.

Amara also opened himself up to the RCMP—offering to be interrogated for as long as it would take the federal agents to decide if he indeed was a changed man and no longer posed a risk.

His efforts paid off. The board acknowledged his work with ETA and meeting the RCMP's National Security Enforcement Team. "Following that process, the

**A MESSAGE ABOUT VOTING
IN PRISON BY SENATOR BER-
NADETTE CLEMENT**

*Mailing address: Senator Clement,
Senate of Canada, Ottawa ON K1A
0A4 (no stamp needed)*

Your vote matters. I've been telling that to incarcerated folks across Canada. My staff and I have visited Collins Bay, Edmonton Institution, Edmonton Institution for Women, Kwikwèxwelhp Healing Village, Matsqui, and Mountain. By the time you read this, I'll have visited Stony Mountain, Joliette, and Archambault, too.

My message to every resident of every prison was the same: "It's so important that you vote. A federal election is coming. Are you ready?"

I got different answers everywhere I went. Some folks said they weren't going to vote. Some said they always, always vote. Some people said they wanted to vote, but didn't have enough information.

Actually, a lot of people said they didn't have enough information.

I also heard that you're getting information where you can: from TV, newspapers, family on the outside, and friends on the inside.

Why do I care? I'm a Black senator. I serve Canadians. It matters to me that Black and Indigenous people are over-represented in Canada's prisons. It matters to me that it's harder for folks on the inside to vote.

I have run for office. I was Ontario's first Black woman mayor. It was the honour of my life to serve as Mayor and as a city councillor. I know that representation matters.

I first visited a prison with Senator Kim Pate. We went to Collins Bay in Kingston, Ontario. Guys there told me that they watched CPAC. They were so well-informed about politics and news.

Senator Pate introduced me to Rick Sauvé, who was previously incarcerated, and now does work in prisons. Rick is the leader who fought for incarcerated people's right to vote. He won that right at the Supreme Court – twice. Now, every incarcerated Canadian has the right to vote, in federal and provincial elections, no matter how long their sentence is.

It's been more than 20 years since that case. It's time to think about how well elections in institutions are working – and how they can be improved.

You have the right to vote – but does the process work?

What we know so far As I said, I'll visit nine federal institutions as part of this project. I also sent out a survey to every federal institution. I got 17 answers back. Here's what I heard:

Folks told me that when they voted, it felt like they mattered.

Folks told me that they voted for themselves and for their families on the outside.

They said voting was a way for their voice to be heard.

They said they voted because they couldn't afford not to.

They told me that voting helped connect them to life outside prison – to the communities where they're going, to the story they're still writing.

They also told me they didn't get enough notice before it was time to vote. They didn't know about their right to vote. They didn't hear about party platforms or candidate options. They didn't feel informed or educated or prepared to vote.

How we think the process could be improved

More information. Much more information. Information in as many different ways as possible: posters, pamphlets, political party platforms, information sessions workshops, books, newspapers, conversations, prison computers.

You deserve answers to all your questions:

What's your riding? Who are the candidates running? What do they stand for? What is a riding? Which political parties are the most likely to win? How do I decide who to vote for? Which political parties support incarcerated people?

More involvement by incarcerated folks: engage inmate wellness committees, ethnocultural representatives, pod or house reps. They can help inform people, and connect people with the voting process.

More notice: more time to prepare to vote, to find out about your riding and your candidates, and to register to vote.

More consistency: election liaison officers are the Correctional Service staff that make elections happen in prisons. How supported these officers are has a direct impact on your election experience.

What we're doing next

After I finish visiting federal institutions, my team and I will prepare a report. We'll explain what we heard and what we recommend needs to change. We'll send it to Correctional Service Canada, to Elections Canada, to wardens, to election liaison officers, to prison librarians, to inmate committees, to political parties, and to news media. We'll send a copy of the report to everyone who asks for one.

I will advocate as much as I can for change.

When an election is called, I'll plan to watch the process at Collins Bay Institution. I want to see how an election happens on the inside.

What you can do now Think about what voting will mean for you.

When an election is called, posters will go up in your institu-

tion. The election liaison officer will get organized to prepare polling stations in your institution. They should ask you if you would like to register to vote.






If you're a Canadian citizen over 18 years old, you are eligible to vote. You will need to register. The election liaison officer can give you the form. You will have to provide an address: either where you lived before you were incarcerated, where your family lives, where you were arrested, or where you were convicted and sentenced. You can't use the address of the institution where you're incarcerated.

On the 12th day before the election, incarcerated people will vote. There will be polls in your institution. Every incarcerated person has the right to vote.

Here's how you can prepare: Find out who the election liaison officer is at your institution. If you don't know where your riding is, ask. Ask who the candidates are (some won't be listed yet, and won't be until a few days before the election). Send letters to candidates and political parties to ask for information. Ask your librarian if they have books about politics, government, and elections in Canada. Ask them for information about political parties. Chat with your peers about voting.

Your vote matters. Your voice matters. I hope when the next federal election comes, you'll make your voice heard.


FEDERAL ELECTION






#ItsOurVote

Instruction Card


For Incarcerated Electors at a Federal Election

- 1




Check in with the election officers.

You will receive an outer envelope with a declaration. Read, sign and date the declaration. You will also receive a plain inner envelope, a special ballot and the list of candidates for your riding.
- 2




Go behind the voting screen.
- 3



On your ballot, clearly print the name of your chosen candidate.


If there are two or more candidates with the same name, also print the name of the candidate's political party. Do not print only the name of the political party.
- 4




Fold your ballot to keep your vote secret.

Bring everything back to the election officers and, in their presence:

- 5




First, put the folded ballot in the inner envelope (A) and seal it.
- 6



Place the inner envelope (A) in the outer envelope (B). Sign and date the declaration on the outer envelope (B).

Declarations that are not signed will be set aside, and your vote will not be counted.
- 7




Put the sealed outer envelope (B) in the ballot box.

All votes in the ballot box will be returned to Elections Canada at the end of the day to be counted.

If you accidentally spoil your ballot


You must return the ballot to the election officers who will give you another one. This can only be done once.



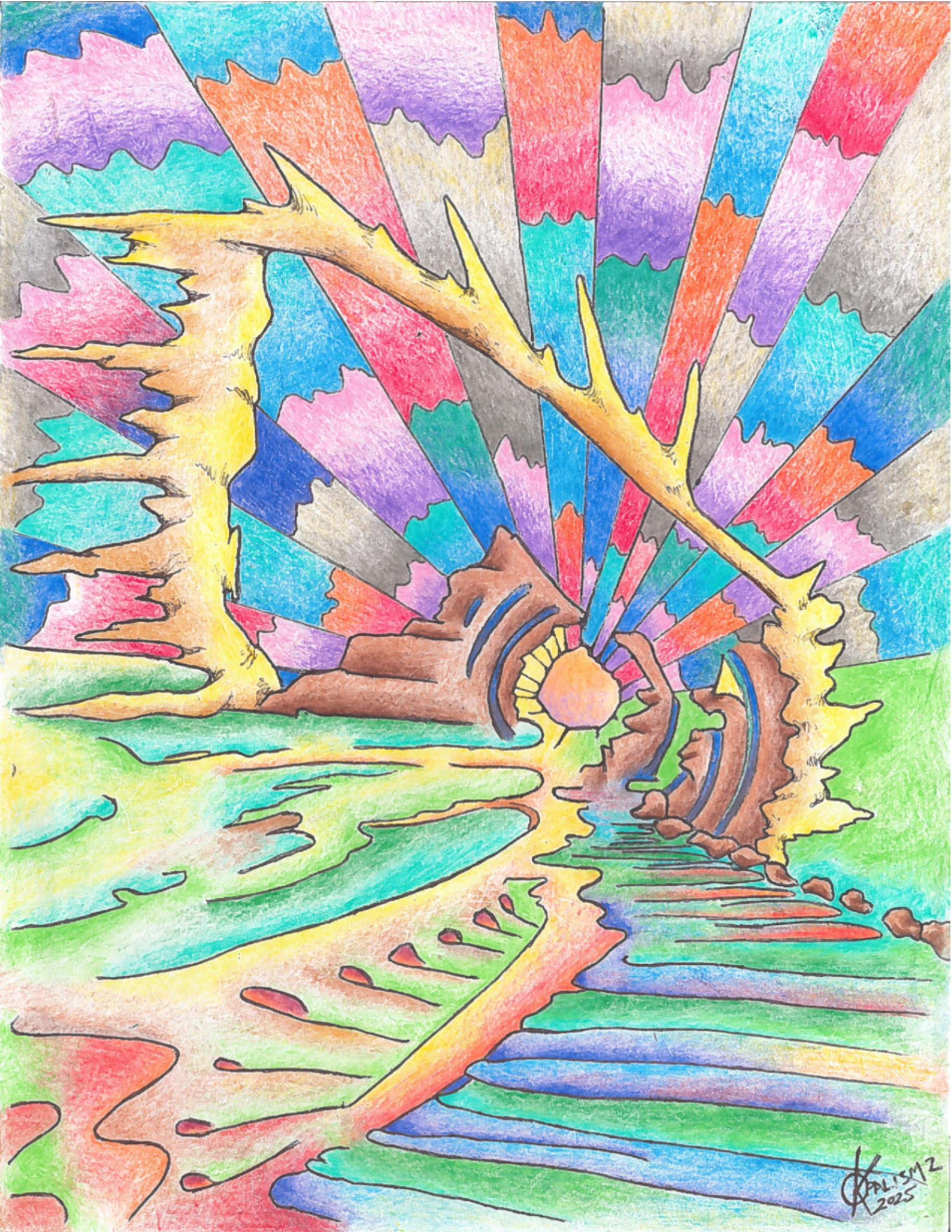
It's Our Vote

Visit elections.ca for the official information you need to vote

1-800-463-6868 | elections.ca | TTY 1-800-361-8935



EC 77100 (09/2020)





NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh

FEDERAL NDP PARTY PLATFORM

Legal Issues

- Reduce reliance on mandatory minimum sentences and return discretion to trial judges (Sena, source).
 - Mandatory Minimum Penalties (MMPs) in Canada are laws that require judges to impose a minimum sentence for specific crimes, regardless of individual circumstances. For example, if someone is convicted of using a firearm during a crime, the judge must give at least one year of imprisonment, even if there are strong reasons to give a lighter sentence.
 - Imagine a woman who has endured years of severe abuse from her partner and one day, in a moment of defending herself, she uses a firearm to protect her life. Even if the judge recognizes that her actions were driven by self-defense or sees her as a person who has been repeatedly assaulted, an MMP law related to firearm use would still require the judge to impose at least the mandatory minimum sentence—likely imprisonment.
 - This lack of flexibility means that the court can't take into account her history of abuse or the context that led to the incident. MMPs remove the ability of judges to give a sentence that truly fits the unique circumstances of the case, which can lead to outcomes that feel unjust and don't account for the realities of people's lives.
- They advocate for the expungement of criminal records for Canadians convicted of minor cannabis possession.
- The party will develop culturally appropriate bail programs and expand restorative justice initiatives.
- Their vision of public safety prioritizes victim support services, including counseling and legal assistance.
- They propose stricter measures to address gun crime, targeting illegal handguns and smuggling.

Prisons

- The NDP aims to end the chronic overrepresentation of those from Indigenous and Black communities in federal prisons by creating a national task force to develop a roadmap for systemic change.
 - In this context, overrepresentation means that Indigenous and Black people are locked up at much higher rates than other groups, even though they make up a smaller part of the population. This happens because of unfair systems and policies.
- They propose removing most mandatory minimum sentences, increasing judicial discretion, and ensuring culturally appropriate bail programs.
- The party supports increasing funding for restorative and community justice programs and strengthening the use of Gladue principles in court proceedings.
- They plan to implement an African Canadian Justice Strategy, working alongside Black Canadians with expertise in criminal justice issues.
- Their platform aligns with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action 30, 31, and 32, emphasizing justice reform for Indigenous peoples.

Harm Reduction

- The NDP pledges to declare a public health emergency to address the opioid crisis.
- They will work with experts to decriminalize drug addiction and reduce the stigma surrounding it, ensuring that those struggling with addiction receive support rather than criminalization.
- The party advocates for safe supply (define) programs, overdose prevention sites, and expanded access to addiction treatment on demand.
- They propose investigating and seeking financial compensation from pharmaceutical companies that contributed to the opioid crisis.
- A national pharmacare program would be implemented to ensure access to prescription medications, including mental health and addiction treatments.

Social Services

- The NDP plans to increase federal funding for legal aid programs across Canada.
- They propose creating 500,000 units of affordable public housing over the next ten

years, with half of these units completed within five years.

- Their plan includes working with provinces and municipalities to expand social and community housing providers.
- Their initiative aims to improve energy efficiency, create jobs, and support economic recovery while ensuring housing accessibility.



Liberal Leader Mark Carney

FEDERAL LIBERAL PARTY PLATFORM

Legal Issues

- Revive the Law Commission of Canada for legal advice on systemic racism, climate change, Indigenous relations, and tech shifts.
- Reintroduce Bill C-22 to repeal mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent drug offenses due to their disproportionate impact on marginalized communities.
- Double funding for the Court Challenges Program to support legal cases on official languages and human rights.
- Modernize courts with virtual hearings to improve accessibility.
- Mandate training for judges on sexual assault law, systemic racism, and cultural assessments in sentencing.
- RCMP Reform:
 - Full external oversight and review of police misconduct.
 - Ban neck restraints, tear gas, and rubber bullets for crowd control.
 - External review of de-escalation training to ensure safer policing.
 - Expand community support services in RCMP-contracted areas.
- Combat systemic racism in justice:
 - Black Canadians Justice Strategy to address over-incarceration.
 - Expand Gladue principles for Indigenous offenders to provide alternatives to imprisonment.
 - Increase access to mental health courts to divert people with mental illness away from incarceration.

Prisons & Criminal Justice Reform

- Eliminate mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent drug and some firearm offenses to address racial disparities.
- Expand drug treatment courts (25 additional courts) integrating substance use treatment into the justice system.
- Support diversion programs for Black and Indigenous individuals to prevent unnecessary incarceration.
- Increase investment in rehabilitation & reintegration:
 - Prison education, job training, and trauma-informed mental health services.
 - Reintegration supports individuals transitioning from prison to society.
 - Mental health courts to divert individuals with mental illness away from incarceration.
 - Expand culturally appropriate, trauma-informed services for Indigenous offenders.

Harm Reduction & Drug Policy

- \$500M investment in harm reduction & addiction treatment recognizes that success isn't solely based on abstinence.
- \$25M public education campaign to reduce stigma around substance use disorders.
- Repeal mandatory minimum penalties for drug-related offenses.
- Encourage police & prosecutors to divert first-time, low-risk offenders into rehabilitation instead of incarceration.
- Expand supervised consumption sites & safer supply programs to prevent overdoses.
- Increase naloxone access and continue \$182M federal funding for substance use treatment.
- Develop national standards for addiction treatment programs.
- Invest in a national overdose prevention strategy & safer drug supply policies.



Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre

FEDERAL CONSERVATIVE PARTY PLATFORM

Legal Issues

- The Conservative Party advocates for stricter sentencing policies, including:
 - Mandatory minimum sentences for those convicted of criminalized acts deemed violent, those who have caused sexual harm to a minor, or those convicted of multiple, consecutive legal transgressions.
 - Favouring consecutive sentencing for multiple convictions instead of concurrent sentencing.
 - For example, if a person in Canada is convicted of armed robbery (5 years) and aggravated assault (3 years):
 - Concurrent sentencing means they serve both sentences simultaneously and spend 5 years in prison.
 - Consecutive sentencing means they serve the sentences one after the other, totaling 8 years in prison.
- The elimination of automatic statutory release, a policy under which most federal prisoners (those serving sentences of two years or more) are automatically released with supervision for the remainder of their sentence after serving two-thirds of their sentence.
- Greater victim and community input in parole board decisions, which could negatively affect prisoners by introducing emotional bias, increasing the likelihood of longer incarceration, disproportionately impacting marginalized groups, discouraging rehabilitation efforts, and compromising privacy and fairness in decision-making.
- A requirement that parole applicants demonstrate rehabilitation before release, setting an unrealistic standard for those who may not have access to adequate rehabilitation programs, perpetuating the punishment-focused nature of the system, and potentially denying parole to individuals who have shown significant personal growth or remorse but lack formal certification of rehabilitation.
- Removing the obligation for judges to treat imprisonment as a last resort, increasing the likelihood of incarceration for non-violent or low-risk individuals, undermining alternatives to imprisonment such as restorative justice or community-based sentences, and contributing to over-incarceration, particularly for marginalized communities.
- Those who are designated as 'Dangerous Offenders' would bear the burden of proving they are no longer a threat to society instead of the state, which could result in prolonged incarceration, as individuals would have to demonstrate rehabilitation through psychological assessments and behaviour reports, potentially facing high barriers to release despite progress made.
- They aim to amend labour codes to grant "at-risk" workers (e.g., prison guards, police, healthcare workers) the right to know when they have been exposed to infectious diseases, even if this conflicts with individual privacy rights.

Prison Issues

- Those who are labeled by courts as 'dangerous offenders' or are in for specific criminalized acts will remain in a maximum-security prison for the duration of their sentence, eliminating their ability to cascade through the system based on meeting behavioural and programming expectations
- They propose job training and work experience programs for prisoners to improve reintegration upon release. *As many of you know first-hand, prison labour programs can be exploitative, with prisoners often paid minimal wages and forced to work in conditions that benefit private companies or the prison system rather than supporting rehabilitation. These programs can also limit post-release employment opportunities, as the skills gained may not be transferable to the outside job market, and the stigma of having worked in prison may hinder reintegration. Additionally, the lack of labour protections, and coercive participation further undermine the rehabilitative intent of such programs.*

Drug Abstinence and Rehab

- The party supports increased security to try to prevent drugs from entering prisons. Increased security means more restrictions within the prisons, it will make it even harder for loved ones to visit prisoners, as well as those from outside organizations to do programming inside, making it more difficult for those of you wanting to make community connections for when you want to get out/for them to get to know you so they can support your parole applications.
- They emphasize rehabilitation and treatment programs rather than harm reduction measures such as supervised consumption sites or decriminalization. For example, they may prioritize mandatory addiction counselling and abstinence-based recovery programs over providing resources, supplies, services and spaces to prevent overdoses.
- Will impose mandatory life sentences on anyone involved in the trafficking, production and distribution of over 40 mg of fentanyl.

Social Services

- The Conservatives believe the federal government should collaborate with provinces, municipalities, businesses, and non-profits to address housing, homelessness, and social infrastructure.
- They support giving out tax incentives in the hopes that private developers will choose to build affordable housing – in place of investing in guaranteed public, affordable housing infrastructure.



Green Leader Elizabeth May

FEDERAL GREEN PARTY PLATFORM

Legal Issues

- Use reparation-based approach to repair relationships and harms from the criminalized act through compensation, while also giving those who were harmed and communities support as well. Use reparative and rehabilitative approach to solve non-serious and non-violent crimes.
- The Green Party calls for reducing police involvement in non-criminal matters, such as:
 - Mental health crises
 - Bylaw enforcement
 - School policing
 - Construction traffic policing
 - Homelessness-related interventions
- They propose a national database to track police use-of-force incidents, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and other demographic factors to identify patterns of systemic racism
- The party demands independent civilian oversight of police misconduct, ensuring accountability and transparency
- They advocate for banning harmful policing practices, such as:
 - Chokeholds and neck restraints
 - Street checks and carding (which disproportionately target Black and Indigenous peoples)
- The Green Party supports implementing all Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action (Sections 25-40) related to justice
- They propose automatic pardons for people convicted of simple cannabis possession, ensuring their criminal records are fully expunged

Prisons

- The Green Party advocates for a restorative justice model that focuses on:
 - Transformative justice, ensuring meaningful accountability and rehabilitation for prisoners
 - Healing-centered approaches that reduce reliance on traditional incarceration
- They propose a nationwide evaluation of restorative justice programs to assess their effectiveness in reducing recidivism and promoting community healing
- They recognize the over-incarceration of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities and call for increased social, economic, and mental health supports to address systemic inequality in the justice system.
- The party insists that prison should be a last resort, only used when public safety

- necessitates incarceration.
- They support reducing incarceration of people with mental health issues, favouring preventative and community-based interventions.
- They propose eliminating mandatory minimum sentences, allowing courts to determine appropriate sentences based on individual circumstances.
- The party advocates for keeping prisoners close to their communities to improve reintegration and rehabilitation.
- The Green Party is committed to ending solitary confinement, ensuring oversight of structured intervention units (SIUs), and implementing recommendations from the Office of the Correctional Investigator.
- They aim to reduce the number of people in pre-trial detention by implementing clearer legal guidelines.

Harm Reduction

- The Green Party would declare the drug poisoning crisis a national public health emergency.
- They advocate for decriminalizing personal possession of illicit drugs, moving towards health-based solutions instead of criminalization.
- They propose creating a national safe supply program, allowing people who use drugs to access regulated pharmaceutical alternatives instead of potentially toxic street drugs.
- Their strategy includes investing in community-based harm reduction services, such as:
 - Expanding access to supervised consumption sites.
 - Increasing funding for drug-checking services to detect dangerous substances.
 - A national Naloxone distribution and education program to reduce overdose deaths.
 - The Green Party plans to hold pharmaceutical companies accountable for their role in fueling the opioid crisis.
 - They propose a gradual shift towards legal regulation of currently illegal drugs, using a public health model similar to alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis.

Social Services

- The Green Party supports reallocating funds from police budgets to invest in mental health services, youth programs, and employment opportunities.
- Their approach emphasizes preventing criminalized acts through social investment, rather than relying on policing and incarceration.
- They advocate for expanding affordable housing programs, ensuring that all Canadians have access to stable living conditions.
- They prioritize culturally appropriate mental health supports for Indigenous, Black, and other marginalized communities.

- Oppose racial profiling in law enforcement and support a fair justice system (2023).

Prison Reform & Incarceration Policies

- *Rehabilitation & Sentencing:*
 - Support for rehabilitation programs within a structured framework (2023).
 - Harsher penalties for domestic violence and treating such criminalized acts as aggravating factors in sentencing (2021).
- *Diversion & Alternatives to Incarceration:*
 - Support for alternative sentencing methods like restorative justice for minor criminalized acts (2023).
 - Advocate for the expansion of mental health courts (2023).

Harm Reduction & Drug Policies

- *Drug Policy & Decriminalization:*
 - Support the decriminalization of drug possession and personal use (2023).
 - Recognize criminalized drug use as a public health issue (2023).
 - Acknowledge stigmatization worsens the opioid crisis (2023).
 - Public Health & Harm Reduction Services:
 - Support for harm reduction strategies such as safe supply programs (2023).

Social Services & Mental Health Support

- *Healthcare Funding & Mental Health Services:*
 - Increase healthcare transfers to Quebec to cover 35% of healthcare costs, ensuring unconditional funding (2021).
 - Support for universal public healthcare with full control by Quebec (2023).
 - Recognize mental health as a national crisis and demand urgent federal action for better support (2023)
- *Employment & Financial Support:*
 - Better access to employment insurance, especially for seasonal and self-employed workers (2023)
 - Advocate for a fair tax system requiring large corporations and banks to contribute more to public services (2023)
- *Housing & Homelessness Prevention:*
 - Invest in affordable housing projects and social housing, particularly for marginalized communities (2021).
 - Make homelessness prevention programs permanent, ensuring Quebec receives its fair share of federal funding (2021).
- *Gender-Based Violence Prevention:*
 - Support for greater investment in shelters and legal services for survivors (2021).



Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet

FEDERAL BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS PLATFORM

(Note that this information was sourced from the party's 2021 & 2023 program, no 2025 stance has been released currently)

Legal Issues

- *Crime Prevention & Justice Reform:*
 - Support for crime prevention, education, recidivism prevention, and restorative justice (2023)
 - Justice Reform focusing on rehabilitation and fair sentencing rather than excessive punitive measures (2023).
- *Judicial System & Court Efficiency:*
 - Advocate for filling all judicial positions without delay to ensure timely trials (2023).
 - Propose a specialized tribunal for sexual and domestic violence cases in Quebec (2021)
 - Call for a public inquiry into "honour crimes" (2021)
- *Discrimination & Racial Profiling:*

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THANK YOU!

Cell Count would like to thank the students who worked hard to bring you this information so you can make an informed decision when you vote! A big shout out to Sofia Sousa and Alyssa Ramjass!

THIS ONE GROUP OF VOTERS FACES ENORMOUS BARRIERS TO CASTING THEIR BALLOT (OPINION)

By Alexandria Bonney, Jo-Ann Roberts and Honora Nedwidek, Contributors, Toronto Star

Alexandria Bonney is a lawyer, prisoner rights advocate, and co-professor of the Prison Law Practicum at the University of Ottawa Faculty of Law. Jo-Ann Roberts is an award-winning journalist, former interim leader of the Green Party of Canada, and author of "Storm the Ballot Box: An Insider's Guide to a Voting Revolution". Honora Nedwidek is a third year law student at the University of Ottawa's Faculty of Law.

People incarcerated in Ontario have a legal right to vote in this week's provincial election. In 2002, the Supreme Court of Canada confirmed this fact when it struck down a law that barred incarcerated citizens serving sentences of two years or more from voting as an unjustifiable infringement on their constitutional rights. In prisons, however, there's the law, and then there is the reality on the ground.

In Ontario, incarcerated electors face a multitude of barriers to exercising their right to cast an informed ballot, or any ballot at all. They cannot simply search the internet for information about their local candidates or provincial party platforms. They cannot turn on the TV to watch a debate, nor can they walk into the nearest polling station to cast their vote. They may not even be able to make phone calls to Elections Ontario to get basic information about the voting process. Instead, prisoners are forced to rely heavily on the government employees running Ontario's overcrowded and understaffed correctional institutions to facilitate their access to the ballot box.

Historically, corrections staff have not been up to this task. In 2018, for example, several women incarcerated at a federal prison in Kitchener were unable to vote in that year's provincial election because staff failed to distribute ballots in time. Following the 2019 federal election, the Ontario Ombudsman found that a young prisoner had been unable to exercise his right to vote because the youth facility where he was being held "didn't have a proper process in place to ensure that young people were able to vote." One year later, the Ombudsman received a complaint from another provincial jail where staff incorrectly told a prisoner that he was ineligible to vote in the 2021 federal election. These complaints are likely just the tip of the disenfranchisement iceberg, however — many prisoners choose to suffer in silence rather than participate in slow, ineffective complaints processes that can expose them to reprisals from prison staff.

During federal elections, Elections Canada liaison officers are legally required to ensure that

all eligible incarcerated electors who wish to vote are able to register to do so. They must also provide prisoners with candidate information and work with local returning officers to establish polling stations in all correctional institutions. Turnout among incarcerated electors during federal elections still consistently trails general voter participation by a wide margin — just 41.2 per cent of eligible prisoners cast a valid ballot in the 2021 federal election compared to 62.6 per cent of voters overall — but these legal requirements nevertheless create some basic legal obligations on the part of government authorities to facilitate prisoner participation in the democratic process.

No similar legal obligations exist under Ontario's Election Act, however. Beyond a single reference made in the context of residency requirements, the provincial legislation fails to mention incarcerated Ontario electors at all. Section 14(1) of the Act does require that polling stations be made available in institutions such as hospitals, long-term care homes, and psychiatric facilities, but jails and prisons are not included within its scope.

Voting by mail from within prison is a daunting process at the best of times, but it can become nearly impossible when an early election is called. During this snap provincial election (*Cell Count editor's note: and now federal election*), incarcerated electors must scramble to request, receive and return their mail-in ballots in just 29 days if they wish to make their voices heard.

We must call these failures what they are: voter suppression. When our democratic institutions neglect the unique needs of incarcerated electors and fail to provide them with the basic tools they need to cast an informed vote, prisoners are denied a basic constitutional right.

Next election, we must do better. Prisoners need access to polling stations within their institutions, assistance obtaining mail-in ballots and fulfilling eligibility requirements, and meaningful information about parties and candidates. Most of all, we need to recognize that, whether convicted of a crime or legally innocent and awaiting trial, incarcerated people remain full citizens of our democracy, with the same right to participate in the political processes that shape our collective future.

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT USED TO BUILD SOCIAL HOUSING. THEN IT STOPPED. HOW IS THAT GOING?

Rebecca Zandbergen, CBC with files from Andrea Hoang, August 28, 2023

Consecutive federal governments in the 1980s and 90s pulled back on funding new affordable housing

Many agree we're in the middle of a national housing crisis. So how did we get here?

It depends on who you ask, but for many housing experts,

affordability advocates and municipal officials, the answer lies in part with a policy shift consecutive federal governments joined decades ago. A shift that some argue provides clues on how to fix the current housing conundrum.

Despite the prime minister's assertion earlier this month that housing isn't primarily a federal responsibility, it hasn't always been that way.

Canada had long provided subsidized housing for people who couldn't afford to pay market value: for workers and returning veterans after the Second World War, for example, and in the 1970s and early 80s as pressure mounted for Ottawa to intervene during a series of recessions.

In the early to mid-1990s, back-to-back governments of different political stripes — first the Conservative government under Brian Mulroney and then Jean Chretien's Liberals — began pulling back from the business of affordable housing.

Facing big deficits and with neoliberalism taking hold globally, Ottawa reduced spending on housing, cut the federal co-operative housing program (one that saw the construction of nearly 60,000 homes) and eventually pulled the plug on building any new affordable housing units altogether.

We now have a 30 year deficit in non-market housing, said Andy Yan, director of the city program at Simon Fraser University.

"We're dealing with the consequences now," said Yan. Specific populations are struggling for housing that is affordable, that has some kind of relationship to their income.

"We see who's paying the price on our streets in Canada."

Canada's housing crisis has been the Liberal government's priority at this week's cabinet retreat in Charlottetown, P.E.I., with the country's housing minister, Sean Fraser, even suggesting the the federal government is considering a cap on the number of international students to ease the pressure on the housing market.

According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. (CMHC), Canada needs to build 5.8 million new homes — including two million rental units — by 2030 to tackle housing affordability.

Municipalities left to manage housing file

It's not just the federal government that's passed the buck on affordable housing. Over a number of years in the late 90s and early 2000s, the Conservative government in Ontario, under Mike Harris, passed the file to municipalities to manage.

Devolving responsibility in itself is not a problem, said Mur-taza Haider, professor of data science and real estate management at Toronto Metropolitan University. That is, of course, if it is accompanied by giving more resources, he said.

And according to Haider, that hasn't happened.

"Responsibility for social housing ended up with local gov-

ernments despite their severely constrained revenue base, he said. Municipal governments get 10 per cent of the taxes we pay. 90 per cent of our taxes go to the feds and the provinces."

In 2017, the federal government announced it was "re-engaging in affordable housing through the National Housing Strategy, and said it would invest more than \$82B over 10 years to build stronger communities and help Canadians across the country access a safe, affordable home."

But the realization is that the demand for such housing far exceeds the supply and the subsidies and the support that the three tiers of governments are providing, said Haider.

At 86, Milton Mayor Gord Krantz is familiar with changing policies and philosophies on social housing. Krantz is Canada's longest serving mayor, having been in the seat since 1980. He was a town councillor for 15 years before that.

"Downloading usually will start at the top, he said. The federal government is the top of the food chain. They downloaded on the province and then the province downloads on municipalities. We're the end of the food chain."

"But all levels of government need to come together to tackle the housing crisis," said Krantz. It's come to a peak now. We're all going to have to get our act together to address this looming problem, he said.

It comes down to money. The Region of Halton — which Milton is a part of — needs more money for affordable housing, said Krantz.

"The federal and provincial governments, with their taxing abilities, they can make it work, he said. Could they maybe cut back in an area or two and put an extra billion or two into social housing? I think they have the ability to do that."

CBC contacted the office of the housing minister, who referred questions to the CMHC. It didn't

respond by deadline.

Can the private sector pick up the pieces?

In the absence of government leadership, it's clear who has taken charge, says Leilani Farha, global director with the human rights organization, The Shift.

"When [Ottawa] retreated from the housing market, they allowed the private sector to invade the space and come in a very unregulated way," said Farha, who is also the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing.

As result, Canada now has an unruly and very powerful private real estate sector, said Farha. They're used to being on a gravy train and receiving preferential tax treatment without having to provide any social housing.

For Farha, the answer to easing Canada's housing crisis is two-fold: better regulate the private sector so developers are compelled to include affordable housing in their portfolios and governments need to pony up more money for social housing projects.

Simply flooding the market with new market value units isn't the answer, she said.

"Traditional supply-demand economics do not apply anymore in the housing sector," she said. "Institutional investors with so much money and ability to finance are speculating with housing."

"It's skewed the whole market."

Farha believes federal governments in the 90s made a grave mistake when they abandoned the social housing file, but the bigger mistake was losing the vision.

"Housing is for households and not speculative investment," she said. "Changing that vision was a colossal mistake."

THREAT OF FEDERAL ELECTION COULD SINK NEW WRONGFUL CONVICTION COMMISSION, SAYS INNOCENCE CANADA



RECOVERY BY MAIL

WISRCanada offers free Twelve Step-based recovery to inmates who are troubled by compulsive or risky sexual behaviour through our "Writing to Inmates Seeking Recovery" program. We start by providing recovery literature to inmates. Next we connect individual inmates with a volunteer letter writer who has worked the Twelve Steps themselves and are experienced sponsors.

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By Kathleen Martens, APTN News, Oct 03, 2024

Bill C-40 was designed to speed up conviction review process

An organization that works to free innocent people from Canada's prisons says hope is fading that an independent body to review possible wrongful convictions would be created before the next federal election.

Ron Dalton, president of Innocence Canada, says a publicly funded Miscarriage of Justice Review Commission is sorely needed, but expressed doubts Bill C-40, also known as David and Joyce Milgaard's Law, will be passed before the next federal election.

"Our applications have ticked up," said Dalton, who was exonerated for killing his wife in 1989. "We're reviewing more than a hundred possible wrongful conviction cases.

"But it takes (us) years to get them into court."

Dalton made the comments Wednesday in Toronto at an event to mark International Wrongful Conviction Day and the 10th anniversary of Innocence Canada, formerly the Association in Defence of the Wrongly Convicted.

"Plus, we only review homicide cases," Dalton said of the non-profit group. "We spend half our time fund raising."

Advocates for the wrongly convicted like Innocence Canada have been lobbying for an independent commission funded by the government to make it faster and easier for prisoners to apply for conviction reviews. The commission would be comprised of judges and lawyers to review potential miscarriages of justice.

Harry LaForme, a former Ontario Supreme Court judge, echoed Dalton's concerns. LaForme co-chaired a series of meetings for the Trudeau government to gather input into Bill C-40, which is now before the Senate.

"I don't even know if it's going to pass," said LaForme while addressing the Toronto event. "An election's coming up and I imagine that bill will die."

Justice Minister Arif Virani was invited to the gathering at the Ontario Bar Association but was unable to attend and sent a video statement instead.

"Taking on these cases can seem like a thankless task, especially in justice systems where the system itself is not designed to admit its mistakes," Virani said in his statement. "In Canada, that has meant that people who are over-represented in the criminal justice system, Indigenous and Black people especially, are underrepresented when it comes to receiving remedies if wrongfully convicted.

"I want to single out Innocence

Canada for its support and leadership on C-40," he added, "and more broadly, for its essential role in helping to identify numerous wrongful convictions and ensuring greater access to justice for many miscarriage-of-justice applicants."

Bill C-40 has gone through the House of Commons where the Liberals, NDP and Bloc Quebecois voted in favour while all Conservative MPs have voted against. The bill is currently in second reading in the Senate and Virani said he's looking forward to its "swift passage."

Innocence Canada chooses who it helps

According to Innocence Canada's website, 29 people have been exonerated with the help of the non-profit organization since 1993. It only accepts submissions from people convicted of murder who have exhausted all other court appeals, including before the Supreme Court of Canada.

Its lawyers then apply to the Department of Justice for a ministerial review of convictions that can take up to two years.

Dalton said even notorious serial killer Robert Pickton once sought the organization's help.

"He wrote a letter saying he didn't kill all those women," Dalton told APTN News in an interview.

Pickton died suddenly in May after being attacked by another inmate at a Quebec prison. The B.C. man was convicted in the deaths of six women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, and further suspected in the disappearances and deaths of another 21, who were mostly Indigenous.

Dalton said the organization saved the letter but did not respond to Pickton, preferring to help those who are not guilty.

"Wrongful convictions are a poison, they're an evil," said LaForme, who is Anishinabe from Ontario. "The justice system is a human system and we make mistakes.

"Judges are capable of doing that, judges are capable of doing wrong. We have to fix that quicker."

Johnathan Rosenthal of the Law Society of Ontario said in a speech that wrongful convictions have "devastating consequences."

He noted it was important for a group like Innocence Canada to offer hope to wrongly convicted people across the country.

The organization invited numerous exonerees, including two Ojibwe men from Manitoba, to attend the anniversary in person.

Poillievre says he supports involuntary addiction treatment for minors, prisoners

The Conservative leader's statement comes as multiple provinces debate the merits of involuntary care

By Kate McKenna, CBC News, Oct 10, 2024

Conservative Leader Pierre Poillievre says he supports involuntary drug addiction treatment for minors and prisoners when they are found to be incapable of making decisions for themselves — but is still looking into whether he can support it for non-incarcerated adults.

In July, when asked about a potential national strategy to compel drug users into treatment, Poillievre told reporters he was "open" to the idea of involuntary drug treatment for addicts but was not sure whether you could take someone off the street who hadn't committed a criminal offence and successfully rehabilitate them.

On Thursday, he was asked the question again.

"I believe for children, and for prisoners who are behind bars, there should be mandatory drug treatment, when they are found to be incapable of making decisions for themselves," Poillievre said in Toronto.

"For adults, I'm still doing a lot of research on how that would work."

Poillievre also repeated his promise to defund programs that prescribe drugs to people at high risk of overdosing on toxic street drugs — what the federal government calls "safer supply" — and to promote recovery and rehab instead.

He also promised to tighten border controls to prevent drugs from being imported into Canada.

Poillievre cited the case of Brianna MacDonald, 13, of Abbotsford, B.C. MacDonald died of a suspected overdose in August after leaving treatment, despite her parents' objections.

"There's no question in my mind that she should've been in mandatory, involuntary, psychiatric and substance abuse treatment, rather than in a homeless encampment in a tent," he said.

Involuntary addictions care is a topic of fierce debate in several provinces, including British Columbia, New Brunswick, Alberta and Ontario.

Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland was asked about Poillievre's position Thursday. Without agreeing or disagreeing with the Conservative leader, she said her government supports a "science-based approach."

"We have to use all the tools that we have at our disposal, to make sure people get the treatment they need, and sometimes a person can be too sick to really recognize what treatment they need and we also have to be sure that people are safe in their communities," Freeland said.

According to recent government data, there have been more than 44,000 opioid-related deaths in Canada since 2016, and 80 per cent of opioid-related deaths involve fentanyl and fentanyl analogues.

Civil liberties groups, including the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA), have raised concerns about the prospect of involuntary treatment. They point out that the courts have established individuals have a Charter right to decline medical treatment, and people who are incarcerated have not lost their Charter of Rights protections.

"I would add that it's well documented within prisons that there's a lack of resources for voluntary treatment, so why not start there?" said Anaïs Bussi eres McNicoll, director of the fundamental freedoms program at the CCLA.

New Brunswick Premier Blaine Higgs has refused to rule out preemptively using the Constitution's notwithstanding clause to protect any involuntary treatment law from a Charter challenge.

Others have warned that forcing people into care is not an effective way to treat addiction and risks driving people away from the health care system.

"If you look at global statistics, it doesn't work," said Leslie McBain of the group Moms Stop the Harm, an advocacy group representing Canadian families affected by substance-use-related harms and deaths.

"It isn't successful because people have to want to recover, they have to come to the need to recover on their own."

She also said the "devil is in the details" and without knowing what form of involuntary treatment is being proposed, it's hard to judge the potential effects.

She said provinces should focus on making sure there are enough low-barrier recovery options for people with addictions who want treatment.



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Convict Lives Matter

THE IMPORTANCE OF VOTING FROM INSIDE

By Kayla Lui

Prisoners gained the right to vote in Canada in 2002 through the Supreme Court Case of *Sauvé vs Chief Electoral Officer*. Prisoners, under section 3 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, fought for their right to vote against the Government of Canada. After earning this right, prisoners should vote because it upholds democracy, helps with voting representation, and supports those outside to reintegrate into society. In Canada, prisoners have the right to vote, which restates that democracy applies to everyone.

One of the key reasons to vote while in prison is that government policies directly affect prisoners. Laws on sentencing, prison conditions, rehabilitation programs, and reintegration support are decided by elected officials. By voting, prisoners have a say in shaping the policies that impact their lives and the justice system as a whole. Prisons are also dictated by the federal government.

Allowing prisoners to vote also helps to reduce the marginalization of certain groups in voter turnout. Historically, Indigenous, Black and racialized people are over-represented in Canadian prisons, but underrepresented when it comes to voting. Ensuring these communities have a voice in elections can help bring attention to social and systemic inequities.

Additionally, voting supports rehabilitation by fostering a sense of civic responsibility. Participating in elections reinforces the idea that prisoners remain members of society.

Finally, a strong democracy includes all voices. Denying voting rights to prisoners would weaken democratic principles by excluding a group of people directly affected by government decisions. By voting, prisoners contribute to shaping a fair justice system and focus on rehabilitation rather than exclusion.

Why is voting important

Voting is a fundamental right of every eligible voter. It is the cornerstone of democracy, ensuring that all voices are heard and represented. By participating in elections, you can have a direct impact on the policies and decisions that shape your daily lives, from healthcare and education to the economy and the environment.

One of the most important reasons to vote is that it strengthens democracy. A high voter turnout leads to a government that more accurately reflects the will of the people. When fewer people vote, decisions are made by a smaller portion of the population, which can result in policies that do not represent the majority. Currently, marginalized folks in Canada tend to show up less in elections, and therefore, their voices continue to go unheard.

Voting also holds elected officials accountable to their party platforms and advocates

for reform that reflects their values. Politicians make promises during a campaign, and voting allows citizens to choose leaders who align with their values and expectations. If officials fail to meet their commitments, voters can remove them in the next election.

Additionally, voting is essential for ensuring representation for all communities. Certain groups, such as Indigenous peoples, racial minorities, people inside, and low-income folks, have historically been underrepresented in politics. Individuals from all backgrounds can help create a more inclusive and equitable society by voting.

Finally, voting is a right that many prisoners worldwide do not have. By casting a ballot, prisoners here can honour the struggles of those inside, who fought for your right to vote. Every vote matters, and by participating in elections, citizens help build a stronger, fairer, and more representative Canada.

How to vote in Canada

In Canada, prisoners are given one day to vote, approximately 13 days before the general election date. Offering one day of voting limits the opportunity for prisoners to vote. For those on the outside, there are various opportunities to vote, such as on the voting day, in advanced polls, by mail, or at the electoral office leading up to election day.

Furthermore, prisoners are often being watched heavily by guards and their secrecy of the ballot may not be protected from staff, who often have political views that oppose their own. This loss of secrecy violates the voter's rights, yet they simply have no choice if they want to vote. While it is a great first step, prisoners winning the right to vote in 2004, there are many more steps to take to improve voting inside.

In addition to those voting inside prisons, prisoners may have loved ones outside of prison who should also be voting with your rights in mind. Please see Cell Count's article on the party stances to see who aligns with you most. For those recently released or living on the outside, here are some tips on voting...

1. Bring one or more pieces of Identification (or mail) that contain your name and fixed address. **If you do not have a fixed address, you can still vote, with additional paperwork. Please go to your nearest Returning Office to find out more. <https://elections.ca/> -> Voter information service -> enter a local postal code and it will provide you with the location and phone number.

a. Some examples of

proof of ID are a driver's license, health card or passport + mail with an address, two utility or phone bills, etc.

2. You can vote on election day OR earlier in the returning office (mentioned above). You can also vote in "advanced polls" which are a set number of days ahead of the election. You can also apply to vote by mail at election.ca --

COVER STORY CONT'D

RCMP informed your PO [parole officer] that they considered you to no longer be radicalized and that the change in your values, attitudes and belief appears to be long term. Further, that they believe you could be a positive influence on others who hold radical ideologies," the board members wrote in granting Amara parole in 2022.

"I beg you, from the bottom of my heart, I don't want you to go to your bed tonight anxious about me," Amara told the board members. "I don't want you to worry about me, because you're not going to be hearing anything bad about me in the future."

"We certainly hope not," the panel chairman said. "For no personal reason, I hope we don't see you again."

Amara was concerned about taking our private conversations public when I first asked to write this story—scared to be back in the news. "I think, on one hand, he just wants to live a normal life, if you can call it that," Dena told me. "He wants to move on from what happened."

It took Amara weeks to decide, and I didn't push him. I also worried about his name in the headlines and the stress it may cause.

But Amara changed his mind,

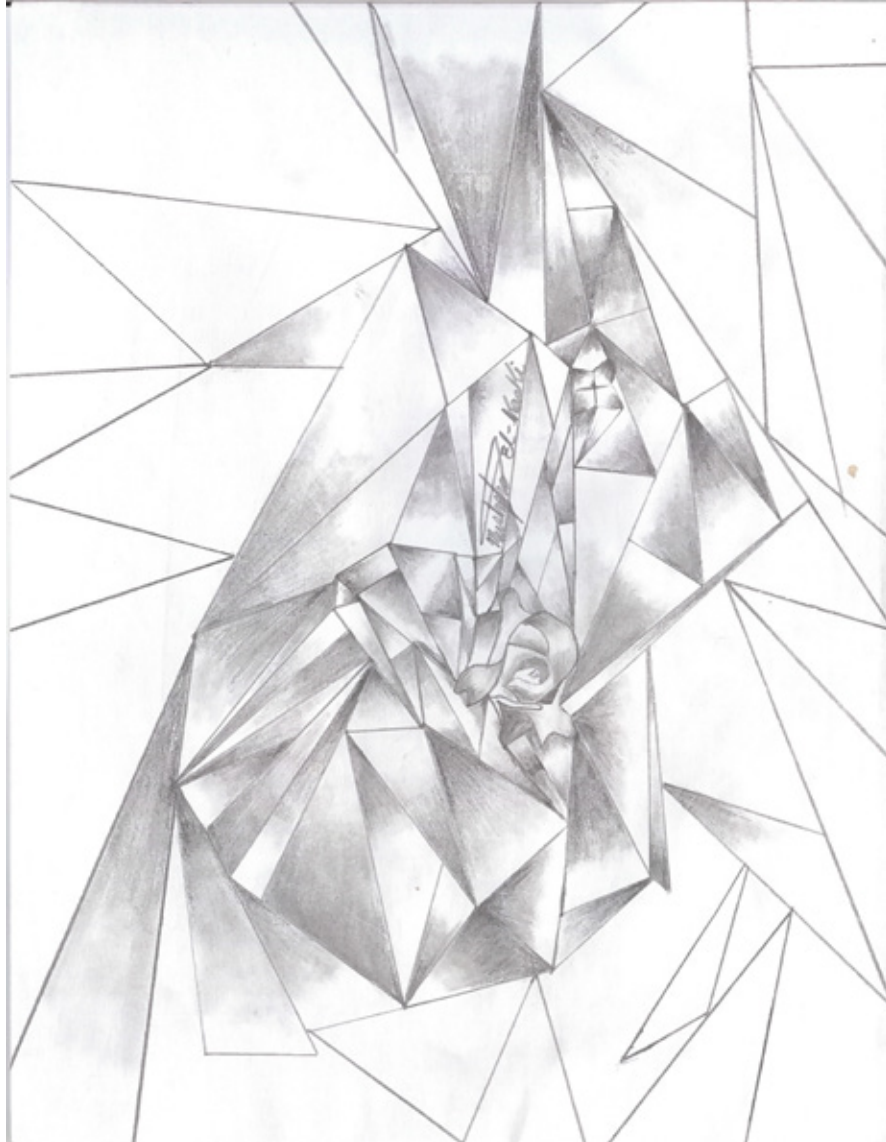
in part, in the hope of being forgiven beyond his inner circle. "I've been uber-scrutinized by Corrections, the Parole Board, and the RCMP, but not yet by the public," he wrote me. "I don't believe that redemption is possible without public scrutiny." He said he hoped his experience would help others learn from his mistakes and wanted his family—particularly his daughter—to read something in the media and be proud rather than feel ashamed.

It feels significant, nearly two decades after his arrest, to be writing a story about Amara the repentant terrorist, since I had been the first to introduce Canadians to Amara the terrorism suspect.

I didn't have any regrets about the reporting we did around Amara's arrest, even as I lamented some of the fallout. The fact remains he was convicted in a court of law—a conviction that he appealed and lost. Of course, there's no way to know if he could have been stopped earlier, through counselling. But he admits his guilt and often himself says he is grateful he was caught.

And yet Amara has certainly paid a price by living almost half his life behind bars. As he notes, his family and friends, the parole board, and even the RCMP believe he deserves a second chance. I didn't want his story to end the day he was sentenced as a terrorist.

I asked Amara if, maybe, that's why he reached out to me in the first place—if he was craving this full-circle moment. "I do think I wanted to show you I'd changed," he said. "What you do with that is up to you. I know you have a job to do."



TT
TOUGH TIMES INC.

HELPING YOU TO SUPPORT YOUR INCARCERATED LOVED ONES ACROSS CANADA

ABOUT US
TT team members are real people that have experienced the real struggles of the Canadian Correctional System
Our goal is to introduce the friends and family members of incarcerated individuals, to as much need-to-know information as we can.


WHY CHOOSE US?
Not only will we gather items, we will build and ship a **Pen Pack** to your loved ones that are doing hard time anywhere in Canada.

OUR SERVICES

- Direct connection to helpful resources
- Easy access to CSC forms
- Support letter assistance

VISIT US
www.toughtimesinc.ca
Tough Times Don't Last, Tough People Do!

PASAN IN-REACH SCHEDULE



<p>TEDC Tuesdays TSDC Wednesdays Call Eveline at ext 238 to book a 1-on-1 or group.</p>	<p>Maplehurst 2x/month Wednesdays HWDC every other Wednesday. Call Cherisa at ext 233 to book a 1-on-1/group</p>
<p>Hep C Workshops CNCC 4th Tues & Weds of the month TSDC 3rd Tues of the month. Run by Chance ext 230</p>	<p>Ontario Federal Pens Look out for our posters. Workshops run by RJ ext 222</p>

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

PASAN's office, where we publish Cell Count, is on the historical territory of the Huron-Wendat, Petun, Seneca and, most recently, the Mississaugas of the New Credit Indigenous peoples. This territory is covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Haudenosaunee and the Ojibwe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the lands and resources around the Great Lakes.

HIV+ CLIENT SERVICES

- In order to be a client & access these services you need to have confirmed HIV+ status and be a prisoner or ex-prisoner (all times Eastern Standard time)
- Phone Hours: Mon - Fri from 9-5, except Tuesday mornings
 - Workshops and Programming - Scheduled usually on Mondays or Thursdays, give us a call or check out our website for a complete list of events we have scheduled.
 - ID Clinic - cancelled for now
 - Release Funds - \$50 (twice a year max)
 - TTC Tokens - 2 each for clients who attend workshops
 - Harm Reduction Materials - Mon - Fri from 9-5, except Tuesday AM (Safer-Crack-Use-Kits, Safer-Needle-Use-Kits, Piercing Needles, Condoms, etc.) - for everyone.
- Sometimes we and the phones are very busy so please keep trying!

ABOUT CELL COUNT

PASAN publishes 'Cell Count', a minimum of 4 issues per year. We are based in Toronto on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of New Credit First Nation, the Haudenosaunee, the Huron-Wendat and home to many diverse Indigenous peoples. It is sent out for FREE to Clients & Prisoners in Canada. If you are on the outside or part of an organization, please consider a donation @ \$20 per year. We are proud to release our newest issue to you. We are also grateful for all the wonderful feedback we have been receiving from our readers, and encourage you to keep putting your two cents in. Our goal is to have most of our content written and produced by prisoners and ex-prisoners, so we highly encourage you to get in touch with us if you're interested in

being part of the Cell Count team.
 Publisher: PASAN
 526 Richmond St E, Toronto, ON M5A 1R3
 Circulation: 700+ - Recirculation: ???

All original artwork, poems and writings are the sole/soul property of the artist and author.

Fair Dealing in the Canadian Copyright Act:

Sections 29, 29.1, 29.2: "Fair dealing for the purpose of research, private study, education, parody, satire, criticism, review, and news reporting does not infringe copyright."

A NOTE ABOUT PEN PALS:

Here is a list of correspondence services for people inside (alternatives to pen pals, which is, sadly, no longer a part of Cell Count):

Canadian Inmates Connect: Currently, there is a \$35/year subscription. Your ad will be placed on a website, and people with internet access browse through to decide who to connect with. A point of caution: you are asked to say what you have been convicted for, and your full name will be published online. Melissa is the person to contact for more information. Write or call her at: Canadian Inmates Connect Inc. 3085 Kingston Rd, Suite 267, Toronto, Ontario, M1M 1P1 - (647) 344-3404

Black and Pink: Specifically for queer and trans prisoners. They are based in the United States, it does not cost anything to be part of the list, and you don't have to tell them your conviction. Here is how to reach them: Black and Pink National Office, 614 Columbia Rd, Dorchester, MA 02125
 617.519.4387

Prison Fellowship Canada: This is a faith-based, Christian organization that connects prisoners with volunteers of either the same gender, or where there is a 15-20 year age difference. The point is for you to have an outlet to express yourself to someone who will listen. If you are of the Christian faith, this may be a great option for you. You can reach them for more info at: Prison Fellowship Canada - National Office, 5945 Airport Road, Suite 144, Mississauga, ON L4V 1R9
 905.673.5867

Prisoner Correspondence Project: "...a solidarity project for gay, lesbian, transsexual, transgender, gendervariant, two-spirit, intersex, bisexual and queer prisoners in Canada and the United

States, linking them with people who are part of these same communities outside of prison." - From their website. Write to them here: QPIRG Concordia c/o Concordia University

1455 de Maisonneuve Ouest, Montreal, QC H3G 1M8

If you have had success using a pen pal service (other than ours) and would like to share it with other Cell Count subscribers, please write to us or call. We can list it in a future issue.

MOVING?

We were getting about 75 Cell Counts sent back to us each mail-out labelled, 'Not Here'. Please help us reduce our mailing expenses by letting us know of any address change, ASAP! Thank you for taking care with this.

CALLING ALL ARTISTS, WRITERS (FICTION, NON-FICTION), ILLUSTRATORS, CARTOONISTS, POETS, JOURNALISTS (ASPIRING OR OTHERWISE), AND OTHER CREATIVE TYPES:

We want your submissions! We get lots of letters from our readers telling us how much they love seeing all your work and they're hungry for more. Send us your stuff and get published in Cell Count. When you send us stuff, please make sure you write a line in that gives us permission to publish your work. Also, let us know if you would like your work returned to you or sent on to someone else! Please also type your work or write clearly if you can!

Writers: We get a lot of great work sent in that we are unable to use because of very limited space. Apologies. Please consider the column width & keep articles/poems tight & to the point. Honestly, the first items to go in are the ones that fit nicely and leave space for others - quality and quantity! Also, let us know in writing if it's ok to edit your work for grammar, spelling and so we can fit it in.

Please note: If you do send something to us, please give us a call if you can so we can look out for it in the mail. Also, call us again at least a week after you send it to make sure we got it. If not, if you're sending in a piece of writing, we can transcribe it over the phone for you, so keep a copy of everything you send us!

Women are the fastest-growing prisoner population in Canada, but often their experiences are marginalized in conversations about the prison system. We want to hear your take on prison, life, family, or anything else you're interested in writing about. We can guarantee confidentiality, and can publish your pieces under a pseudonym if you want! Please submit your articles, poetry, art, or letters to the Cell Count editor at 526 Richmond St E, Toronto, ON M5A 1R3.

CELL COUNT AT BATH INSTITUTION

We have been informed that all Cell Count subscriptions at Bath Institutions are given to the PEC worker to distribute. So please give them a visit and ask for your envelope by name!

CONTACT NUMBERS

If you are in any Federal/Provincial Institution or Detention Centre call us only with this #: Toll-free 1-866-224-9978

NEXT CELL COUNT DEADLINE

Please get your next submissions in for the 30th anniversary issue ASAP! If your submissions didn't make it into this issue, it will be prioritized for the next. Same with future submissions! So don't hesitate to send it in when it's ready!

CELL COUNT EVALUATIONS

Please take a few minutes to complete the evaluation form we've included with this issue and mail it back to us. We use these evaluations to make sure that Cell Count is useful to you and so our funders know we're on the right track. Call us if you would like to do your evaluation over the phone instead!
1-866-224-9978

CELL COUNT PEER LIAISONS

Cell Count is looking for peer liaisons who are currently incarcerated to be a representative for Cell Count inside. You would be responsible for gathering subscribers, letting us know when subscribers have moved, encouraging people to submit their work, helping with evaluations, and answering general questions. Call Sena if you're interested! 1-866-224-9978x234



ATTENTION PRISON FAMILIES!!!!

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EAST COAST

ALLY CENTRE
Take collect calls
150 Bentinck St. Sydney, NS, B1P 1G6 902-567-1766

AIDS COALITION of NOVA SCOTIA
Accept collect calls
1675 Bedford Row, Halifax, NS, B3J 1T11-800-566-2437, 902-425-4882

AIDS COMMITTEE of NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR
Take collect calls
47 Janeway Place, St. John's, NL, A1A 1R7 1-800-563-1575

AIDS NEW BRUNSWICK
65 Brunswick St, Fredericton, NB, E3B 1G51-800-561-4009, 506-459-7518

AIDS PEI
Take collect calls
2-375 University Ave, Charlottetown, PE, C1A 4N4 902-566-2437

AIDS SAINT JOHN
Don't accept collect calls
115 Hazen St, NB, E2L 3L3 506-652-2437

BOOKS BEYOND BARS
P.O. Box 33129
Halifax, NS
B3L 4T6

HEALING OUR NATIONS:
1-800 565 4255
3-15 Alderney Dr, Dartmouth, NS, B2Y 2N21-800-565-4255, 902-492-4255

MAINLINE NEEDLE EXCHANGE
Calls from within Nova Scotia are free
Don't accept collect calls
5511 Cornwallis St, Halifax, NS, B3K 1B3 902-423-9991

SHARP ADVICE NEEDLE EXCHANGE
Accept collect calls
150 Bentinck St, Sydney, NS, B1P 6H1 902-539-5556 (Collect)

SIDA/AIDS MONCTON
Accept collect calls as long as they're HIV related
80 Weldon St, Moncton, NB, E1C 5V8 506-859-9616

QUEBEC

CACTUS
Accept collect calls
1300 rue Sanguinet, Montreal, H2X 3E7 514-847-0067

CENTRE for AIDS SERVICES MONTREAL (Women)
Accept collect calls
1750 Rue Saint-Andre, 3rd Flr, Montreal, H2L 3T81-877-847-3636, 514-495-0990

COALITION des ORGANISMES-COMMUNAUTAIRES QUEBECOIS de LUTTECONTRE le SIDA (COCQSIDA)
Accept collect calls
1 est, rue Sherbrooke, Montréal, H2X 3V8 514-844-2477

COMITÉ des PERSONNES ATTEINTES du VIH du QUEBEC (CPAVIH)
1-800-927-2844
2075 rue Plessis bureau 310, Montreal, H2L 2Y4 1-800-927-2844

ONTARIO

2-SPIRITED PEOPLE of the 1ST NATIONS

Accept collect calls
145 Front Street East Suite 105
Toronto, Ontario M5A 1E3 416-944-9300

AFRICANS in PARTNERSHIP AGAINST AIDS
No collect calls, call PASAN
526 Richmond St E, Toronto, M5A 1R3 416-924-5256

AIDS COMMITTEE of CAMBRIDGE, KITCHENER, WATERLOO & AREA
Accept collect calls
Have a toll-free number
2B-625 King St E, Kitchener, N2G 4V4 519-570-3687 (Collect), 1-877-770-3687

AIDS COMMITTEE OF GUELPH
Accept collect calls, prefer that people use their
89 Dawson Rd, Unit 113, Guelph, N1H 3X2 1-800-282-4505; 519-763-2255 (Collect)

AIDS COMMITTEE of NORTH BAY and AREA
Accept collect calls
201-269 Main St W, North Bay, P1B 2T8 705-497-3560 (Collect)

AIDS COMMITTEE of OTTAWA
700-251 Bank St, Ottawa, K2P 1X3 613-238-5014 (Collect) or Toll Free (ON & QC only) 1-800-461-2182

AIDS COMMITTEE of THUNDER BAY
574 Memorial Ave, Thunder Bay, P7B 3Z2 1-800-488-5840, 807-345-1516 (Collect)

POSITIVE LIVING NIAGARA
Accept collect calls from registered clients
(Recommend that you get a case manager to get registered with them)
120 Queenston St, St. Catharines, ON L2R 2Z3 905-984-8684 or toll free 1-800-773-9843

ANISHNAWBE HEALTH AIDS PROGRAM
No collect calls
255 Queen St E, Toronto, M5A 1S4 416-360-0486

ASIAN COMMUNITY AIDS SERVICE
When prisoners call, they offer them small bursaries to cover their calling fees
107-33 Isabella St, Toronto, M4Y 2P7 416-963-4300 (Collect)

BLACK COALITION for AIDS PREVENTION
Accept collect calls
20 Victoria St, 4th Flr, Toronto, M5C 2N8 416-977-9955 (Collect)

CANADIAN HIV/AIDS LEGAL NETWORK
Accept collect calls
1240 Bay St #600, Toronto, M5R 2A7 416-595-1666 (Collect)

FIFE HOUSE
Accepts collect calls
490 Sherbourne St, 2nd Flr, Toronto, M4X 1K9 416-205-9888

HIV & AIDS LEGAL CLINIC OF ON. (HALCO)
Accept collect calls
55 University Avenue, Suite 1400 Toronto, ON, M5J 2H7 1-888-705-8889

HIV/AIDS REGIONAL SERVICES

(HARS)
Accept collect calls
844-A Princess St, Kingston, K7L 1G5 613-545-3698 (Collect)

ONTARIO ABORIGINAL HIV/AIDS STRATEGY
Accept collect calls
844-A Princess St, Kingston, K7L 1G5 613-549-7540 (Collect)

PEEL HIV/AIDS NETWORK
Accept collect calls
160 Traders Blvd, Unit 1, Mississauga, L4Z 3K7
1-866-896-8700, 905-361-0523 (Collect)

PETERBOROUGH AIDS RESOURCE NETWORK (PARN)
Accept collect calls
60 Hunter St E 2nd Floor, Peterborough, ON K9H 1G5, 1-800-361-2895, 705-932-9110 (Collect)

STREET HEALTH CENTRE
Accept collect calls
Hepatitis C Treatment Program
235 Wellington St, Kingston, K7K 0B5 613-549-1440 (Collect)

THE AIDS NETWORK (TAN)
Don't accept collect calls
101-140 King St E, Hamilton, L8N 1B2 905-528-0854 toll free 1-866-563-0563

THE WORKS
Accept collect calls
277 Victoria St, Toronto, 416-392-0520 (Collect)

TORONTO PWA FOUNDATION
Accept collect calls from clients
200 Gerrard St E, 2nd Flr, Toronto, M5A 2E6 416-506-1400

Toronto Community Hep C Program
Accept collect calls
955 Queen Street East, Toronto, M4M 3P3
416-461-1925 (Collect only on Tuesday & Friday, 11am-5pm)
Once out, please call 416-417-6135

John Howard Society of Toronto
1-866-265-4434

Black Legal Action
720 Spadina Ave. #221, Toronto, ON M5S 2T9 (416) 597-5831

PRAIRIES

HIV COMMUNITY LINK
Accept collect calls
110-1603 10th Ave SW, Calgary, AB, T3C 0J7 403-508-2500

AIDS SASKATOON
1143 Ave F N, Saskatoon, SK, S7L 1X1306-242-5005 1-800-667-6876

CENTRAL ALBERTA AIDS NETWORK SOCIETY
No collect calls
4611 50th Ave, Red Deer, AB, T4N 3Z9 403-346-8858

HIV EDMONTON
9702 111 Ave NW, Edmonton, AB, T5G 0B1 1-877-388-5742

KIMAMOW ATOSKANOW FOUNDATION
Accept collect calls
RR 1, Site 1, Box 133, Onoway, AB, T0E 1V01-866-971-7233, 780-913-9036

NINE CIRCLES COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE
705 Broadway, Winnipeg, MB, R3G 0X2 1-888-305-8647

PLWA NETWORK OF SASKATCHEWAN
No collect calls
Box 7123, Saskatoon, SK, S7K 411 306-373-7766

OUT SASKATOON
213 Avenue C S, Saskatoon, SK S7M 1N3
306-665-1224

PRINCE ALBERT METIS WOMEN'S ASSOC.
No collect calls
54 10th St E, Prince Albert, SK, S6V 0Y5 306-763-5356

RED RIBBON PLACE

(ALL NATIONS HOPE AIDS NETWORK)
2735 5th Ave, Regina, SK, S4T 0L2 1-877-210-7622

STREET CONNECTIONS
No collect calls
705 Broadway Ave, Winnipeg, MB, R3G 0X2 204-940-2504 WOMEN: 50 Argyle, Winnipeg, MB, R3B 0H6 204-943-6379

WEST COAST

AIDS VANCOUVER ISLAND
Accepts collect calls. 713
Johnson St, 3rd Flr, Victoria, V8W 1M8 250-384-2366 or 1-800-665-2437

LINC
33270 14th Ave, Mission, BC, V2V 4Z7 1-877-424-4242 (BC only)

CAAN
6520 Salish Dr, Vancouver, BC V6N 2C7 (604) 266-7616

NATIONAL

CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF ELIZABETH FRY SOCIETIES (Women)
701-151 Slater St.
Ottawa, ON
K1P 5H3
(613) 238-2422

BRAIN INJURY ASSOC OF CANADA
440 Laurier Ave. West, Suite 200
Ottawa, ON K1R 7X6 Toll-free: 1-866-977-2492

CATIE
1-800-263-1638
555 Richmond St W #505, Toronto, ON M5V 3B1

NEW LIFE PRISON MINISTRIES
P.O. Box 123
Arva, ON
NOM 1C0
Aftercare support: 1-888-842-6898

PRISONER SPECIFIC

TORONTO PRISONERS' RIGHTS PROJECT
(Runs the Prisoner Emergency Support Fund)
PO Box
291 Toronto P Toronto, ON M5S 2S8

PRISONERS UNITED ORGANIZATION
PO Box
30009,
Greenbank
North PO,
Ottawa, ON,
K2H 1A3

BLACK INMATES & FRIENDS ASSEMBLY
2518
Eglinton
Avenue W,
Toronto, ON,
M6M 1T1 ph
(416) 652-3131

SMAAC.
org
The
Saskatchewan-Manitoba-Alberta
Abolition
Coalition is
an alliance of
groups from

prairie provinces who collaborate and organize together on issues of prison and police abolition.

EAST COAST PRISON JUSTICE SOCIETY
6061 University Ave, PO Box 15000
Halifax, NS, B3H 4R2
www.eastcoastprisonjustice.ca

West Coast Prison Justice Society/ Prisoners' Legal Services
302-7818 6th Street
Burnaby, BC
604-636-0470

OTHER SUBSCRIPTIONS

OUT OF BOUNDS MAGAZINE
6000 William Head Rd, Victoria, BC V9C 0B5

JOURNAL OF PRISONERS ON PRISONS
c/o Justin Piché, PhD, Dept of Criminology
University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON, K1N 6N5

PRISON FREE PRESS
POBox 39 Stn P Toronto ON M5S 2S6

PRISON BOOK PROGRAMS

BOOKS TO PRISONERS OPIRG-Carleton
326 UniCenter, Carleton University
Ottawa, ON. K1S 5B6
(613) 520-2757

BOOKS 2 PRISONERS
PO Box 78005, 1755 East Broadway
Vancouver, BC, V5N 5W1
604-682-3269 x3019

BOOKS BEYOND BARS
PO Box 33129
Halifax NS, B3L 4T6
902-446-1788

OPEN DOOR BOOKS (ODB)
c/o QPIRG Concordia
Concordia University
1455 de Maisonneuve O
Montreal, Quebec, H3G 1M8
514-848-7585

Write ON!

Supporting prisoners through correspondence



INCARCERATED IN CANADA? NEED INFORMATION?

WRITE ON! is an all-volunteer group whose goal is to help and support prisoners in Canada, through correspondence.

WE CAN:
Research general information you need, such as:
• general legal information
• info on prison rules and policies
• info on resources, programs and services
• and possibly other kinds of information you need.

WE CANNOT:
• Give any kind of professional advice, legal or otherwise
• be a pen-pal service (though we could refer you to one)
• Send anything that could be viewed as sexually explicit
• Send store bought items such as notebooks, crafts, etc.

CONTACT US:
Write ON!
Suite # 234
110 Cumberland Street
Toronto, ON M5R 3V5



Who are we?
We are a group of community volunteers who help to support prisoners in having platonic, safe, and meaningful pen pal connections.

write to us!
A FREE, PLATONIC PEN PAL PROGRAM FOR FEDERAL PRISONERS

Who are we dedicated to?
social justice, anti-racism, and freedom. We believe in the right to dignity and humanity for all.

Penn2Paper
send us a note to one of these addresses depending on your location

Pacific & Prairie Region
Penn2Paper
104-1015 Columbia St.
Box 873
New Westminster, BC
V3M 6V3

Ontario & Atlantic Region
Penn2Paper
455 Danforth Ave
Box 429
Toronto, ON
M4K 1P1

TPRP JAIL HOTLINE
(416) 775-9239

NOW TAKING CALLS FROM:
TORONTO SOUTH DETENTION CTR.
VANIER CENTRE FOR WOMEN
MAPLEHURST CORRECTIONAL COMPLEX

MONDAY, WEDNESDAY, FRIDAY, SATURDAY
9-11AM + 2-4PM

THE JAIL HOTLINE IS FREE FOR PRISONERS SEEKING ADVOCACY, REFERRALS, INFORMATION + SUPPORT!