



DAWN CANADA: DisAbled Women's Network Canada

Reseau d'Action des Femmes Handicapees du Canada

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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE PUBLICATION

Prisons are a Failed Experiment [Especially for Women]

OTTAWA - DAWN Canada: DisAbled Women's Network Canada is submitting a critical report to the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) alleging that the Canadian government has breached its fiduciary duties to federally sentenced women (FSW) in Canada and has disregarded the *Canadian Charter of 'Rights and Freedoms* and certain international human rights obligations.

"Federally sentenced women (FSW) with mental and developmental disabilities are being blatantly discriminated against under Section 17 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Regulation (CCRA) which equates "mental disability" with a security risk, says Yvonne Peters, a human rights lawyer from Manitoba who authored the report. "Corrections legislation perpetuates negative stereotypes and assumptions which characterize mental disability as dangerous. The decision to assign a security level is made by treatment teams, which include correctional officers, who are not mental health professionals." The risk/needs assessment tools create an adverse impact on federally sentenced women with mental disabilities in that they translate individual needs resulting from a disability into a potential management problem. Because of these higher security classifications based on disability, women who are suicidal or have mental or cognitive disabilities, are often isolated, deprived of clothing, and placed in stripped/barren cells.

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With the increased cutbacks to health care and social programs, the law is increasingly coming into conflict with women's lives. We are being relegated into penal institutions instead of receiving appropriate services within the community. Prisons have become a substitute for community based mental health services. It is our position, that federally sentenced women with disabilities, who require ongoing mental health services, receive the most appropriate and effective form of accommodation through the development of community resources outside the prison system.

DAWN Canada is a national organization controlled by and comprised of women with disabilities, from a wide array of backgrounds and disabilities. We are a feminist organization who is working to achieve control over our own lives and end the stereotype that labels us dependent burdens on society. DAWN Canada's mission is to advocate for the self determination, full inclusion, and equal participation of self identified women with disabilities in all aspects of society.

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