



NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Investigative Update

B.C.'s correctional facilities adopt new inspections framework following Ombudsperson's recommendations – but not yet complying with international standards

Victoria – B.C.'s Ombudsperson Jay Chalke released an investigative update today assessing government's progress implementing the Ombudsperson's 2016 report aimed at improving how B.C.'s ten correctional centres are inspected.

Under Inspection: The Hiatus in BC Correctional Centre Inspections was released in June, 2016. Findings in the report included the fact there had been a lapse of legally required regular inspections of B.C. correctional centres between 2001 and 2012. The report also found the inspection framework put in place following the hiatus was not in compliance with international standards and there was a lack of training for inspectors. In addition, the Ombudsperson's investigation found that inspection teams were insufficiently independent from the centres they were investigating.

"The proper inspection of our correctional centres is critical for a variety of reasons," said Ombudsperson Jay Chalke. "It's one key way to ensure the basic human rights of inmates are being respected. Regular inspections also help ensure rigorous health and safety standards are in place and are being regularly monitored, both for inmates and staff," Chalke added. The 2016 report made seven recommendations aimed at making inspections more rigorous, consistent and independent, as well as ensuring inspectors have access to adequate training. In today's update, the Ombudsperson concluded that six of the 2016 recommendations have been fully implemented. Key implemented recommendations include:

- New Corrections Branch policy outlines that inspections must be continuously managed, reviewed and updated. Inspections must be focused on ensuring the safe, secure and humane treatment of inmates, and they must be timely and consistent across correctional centres.
- The Corrections Branch has developed a training course through the Justice Institute of British Columbia for individuals who conduct inspections.
- For all correctional centre inspections there is at least one member present from the Investigation and Standards Office (ISO), part of the Ministry of Attorney General.

A key recommendation made in the report remains outstanding: implementation of the inspection related aspects of the *Nelson Mandela Rules*, the current United Nations standard for the treatment of prisoners. These rules give independent inspectors full authority to access information relevant to inspections, including the ability to interview inmates confidentially and to make recommendations, issue written reports and recommendations and receive transparent responses. In 2016, the ministry accepted the recommendation that the three sections of the Mandela Rules relating to inspections be implemented by March 31, 2018. That has not occurred.



“While I am generally satisfied with the progress that has been made to ensure that correctional centres are being inspected more adequately now, compared to the previous decade, B.C. must start complying with the applicable international standard,” Chalke said. “Two years ago government committed to do so, now it’s time to live up to that commitment,” said Chalke.

The Office of the Ombudsperson will also continue to monitor the independence of the inspection process. “While the ministry is moving in the right direction, inspections require a greater degree of independence outside of government,” Chalke said. “Government accepted that the current solution of adding one inspection team member from outside of the Corrections Branch would be for the interim only until the Mandela Rules were fully operationalized. Independent eyes from outside government are critical for inspections to be credible,” Chalke said, adding his office will continue to monitor the outstanding recommendation relating to the Mandela Rules and will report publicly.

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About the Office of the Ombudsperson

The Office of the Ombudsperson receives enquiries and complaints about the practices and services of public agencies within its jurisdiction. Its role is to independently and impartially investigate these complaints to determine whether public agencies have acted fairly and reasonably, and whether their actions and decisions were consistent with relevant legislation, policies and procedures. In addition to investigating individual complaints, the Ombudsperson also conducts systemic investigations into complex issues. The Ombudsperson has jurisdiction over a wide range of public agencies, including provincial government ministries, crown corporations, government boards, schools, universities and colleges, local governments and self-regulating professions.