

Dear [Recipient's Name],

Re: Urgent Action Needed to End Harmful Lockdowns in Nova Scotia's Provincial Jails

I am writing to bring to your attention a critical issue that has, for years, plagued our provincial jails: the unlawful use of lockdowns attributed to staff shortages. This practice, recently deemed unlawful by the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia (NSSC), has profound implications for the well-being and rights of prisoners across our province.

Lockdowns in provincial jails not only infringe upon prisoners' rights but also exacerbate mental health issues and have detrimental impacts on their overall well-being. Similar to solitary confinement, lockdowns isolate individuals for extended periods, depriving them of meaningful human interaction and subjecting them to heightened levels of stress and anxiety. Research has consistently shown that prolonged isolation can lead to severe psychological harm and exacerbate existing mental health conditions.

The Government of Nova Scotia must indicate, without delay, what actions it is taking to respond to the ongoing violations of the health and human rights of individuals occurring in the form of ongoing "lockdowns". These responses must explain how the government will ensure sufficient staff are available daily to permit prisoners 10-12 hours per day out of cell and access to legal and other visits and communications, services and programming.

The NSSC has suggested addressing staff shortages in correctional facilities through various means, including over-staffing institutions and encouraging joint efforts to increase the use of bail and temporary absences. In light of these suggestions, we urge you to take immediate action to put an end to the harmful practice of lockdowns in Nova Scotia's provincial jails.

Specifically, we call on the government to:

- Prioritize decarceration, including efforts to increase the use of bail and temporary absences for individuals awaiting trial or serving sentences, and
- Implement measures to ensure adequate staffing levels in correctional facilities to prevent the need for lockdowns due to staff shortages.

We must move people out of provincial jails. Four years ago, in March 2020, at the onset of the COVID-19 public health emergency, it was widely recognized that decarceration was a central pillar of the provincial plan to protect against community spread and to preserve hospital capacity. Nearly half the jail population was moved into the community in the first 4-6 weeks of the pandemic. This establishes that it is possible to work together to build new systems of support to replace broken systems of incarceration.

It is imperative that we uphold the rights and dignity of all individuals, including those in our correctional system. By taking decisive action to end the use of lockdowns in provincial jails, we can contribute to a more just and humane correctional system that respects the rights and well-being of all individuals.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]