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Statement on the Office of the Correctional Investigator's Annual Report

With the release this morning of the Office of the Correctional Investigator's (OCI's) Annual Report, Senator Kim Pate is encouraged by the report's emphasis on steps necessary to decarcerate prisoners with mental health issues and Indigenous prisoners. She also supports the recommendations to remove women prisoners from detention in maximum security and segregation units.

"Recognizing that 50% of women classified as maximum security are Indigenous, this report underscores the need to close all segregated units and utilize the legislative provisions that allow for Indigenous communities to sponsor Indigenous prisoners. Correctional policies limit the availability of these provisions. This report underscores why this practice must change," advised Senator Pate. "Many women with disabling mental health issues who are currently held in maximum security units must be transferred out of prisons and into appropriate community-based mental health treatment facilities," added Senator Pate. "Prisons are not, and nor should they be accepted as, alternatives to hospitals or treatment centres."

Senator Pate also emphasized the need to eliminate, rather than simply restrict the use of segregation and other forms of isolation. "The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture has found solitary confinement to be torture. The excuse that the UN still condones segregation in certain forms is an unacceptable justification for Canada's current practices. Canada presents itself as a global human rights leader and our actions must be in accordance with that standard."

The observations and recommendations contained in the report reiterate systemic problems within the federal prison system, particularly with regard to its shameful treatment of Indigenous peoples and those with mental health issues. "The report's findings demonstrate the need for strong and independent judicial oversight of CSC's decision-making with respect to prisoners," Senator Pate concluded.

For more information:

Senator Kim Pate, C.M.

Kim.pate@sen.parl.gc.ca

Tel: 613-995-9220