



Brief presented  
by the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers  
(UCCO-SACC-CSN)  
to the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights  
regarding the study on the human right of federally sentenced  
persons (High-Risk Inmates)

March 20, 2019



## **Background**

Since our creation the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers (UCCO-SACC-CSN) has lobbied for an institution or unit to manage volatile high-risk women offenders who commit violent physical acts against staff, inmates and display self-harming behaviour against themselves. The Union has made several recommendations over the years to manage problematic inmates and to ensure that inmates follow their correctional plans to become law-abiding citizens.

An initial UCCO-SACC-CSN report was produced in 2005 recommending a national strategy for high-risk women offenders and a second one was jointly produced with Correctional Service Canada (CSC) and updated in 2008 (following the death of Ashley Smith) with substantially similar conclusions. Further to this report additional recommendations for inmates with serious mental health issues were added.

In the last report, it was recommended to create units with adequate infrastructure, including qualified and sufficient numbers of staff.

The goal was to ensure that inmates participating in unpredictable violent behaviour towards staff or inmates or were suffering from significant mental health problems would be safely managed and, with the hope of following their correctional plan for safe release back into regular population or society upon release. In addition, with these specialized units, regular inmates (in the regular inmate population) could follow their correctional programs without interruptions/safety risks from high women offenders and receive the required rehabilitative support for safe release back into society.

In addition to this, the Coroner's report of December 2013 and its 104 recommendations must not be set aside, with some of those recommendations having been previously tabled by the Union & CSC.

In 2018, long-term segregation for inmates with significant mental health problems is no longer a feasible option for this type of volatile inmates. So, what are we to do? Where will we send these types of offenders? UCCO-SACC-CSN is, once again, requesting that special high-risk female offender units are created for the following reasons:

1. To reduce the reliance on administrative segregation to manage high-risk offenders. Inmates with severe mental health issues cannot be managed safely in general population or administrative segregation units as they often pose serious dangers to staff, other inmates and to themselves.
2. To ensure swift and immediate treatment of these high-risk women offenders by qualified, multidisciplinary staff which should include psychiatrists, behavioural counsellors, health care staff 24 hours a day, and properly trained correctional officers, etc.
3. To create infrastructure that is conducive to managing. High-risk women offenders to ensure safety for inmates and staff.



4. To allow for general population inmates and those in administrative segregation to receive and have safe access to programs required to meet their correctional plans.

CSC will no longer be at the mercy of provincial hospitals who are not obliged to keep inmates in their custody for treatment. Treatment is often voluntary in provincial hospitals and the usually violent behaviour results in the inmate being sent back to CSC custody. These high-risk units will allow us to provide proper treatment interventions while ensuring inmate and staff safety and avoid unnecessary transfers to provincial hospitals who are not obligated to take or keep the inmate.

### **Conclusion**

UCCO-SACC-CSN recommends adopting the recommendations from the 2005 and 2008 reports. In addition to this we agree with some of the recommendations that came from the coroner's inquest stemming from the investigation conducted into the death of Ashley Smith's.

It is time for CSC to adopt the recommendations made by the UCCO-SACC-CSN Joint Committee on High Risk and to move forward with specialized handling units in each region to meet the needs of managing high-risk women offenders safely, and in the interests of the public. **These specialized units would significantly limit segregation for problematic inmates and would provide appropriate care for inmates demonstrating behavioural problems or suffering from mental health issues.** These units would be an asset to CSC, their employees and inmates.

It would be deplorable to wait for another tragic incident like Ashley before action is taken. The various mental health reports and recommendations for high-risk inmates are all clear. **The Canadian Government must construct specialized units to manage problematic inmates or inmates suffering with mental health issues.**