

John Howard Society of Ontario
Standing Committee on Prison Conditions in Ontario

First Report to the Board:
The Superjails in Ontario

AFTERWORD

Subsequent to the approval of the report by the Board on June 10, 2006, the Board acted on the recommendations of the Committee for follow-up by sending the Report to Monte Kwinter, Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, Michael Bryant, the Attorney General, and their senior officials. Further, as most of the recommendations relate to matters within Minister Kwinter's jurisdiction, a request was made to meet with him to discuss the Report, the plans of his Ministry with respect to these institutions and what the John Howard Society might do to support plans to meet the objectives of the recommendations.

The Minister's office responded in July indicating that Minister Kwinter would meet with us and the date of September 22 was chosen to take advantage of the John Howard Society of Ontario's Board meeting the next day in Toronto, both to ensure the availability of Committee members and for cost-saving purposes. Unfortunately, the Minister's schedule changed and we were informed the day before that we would be meeting instead with the Commissioner of Corrections. We were, however, ensured that the Minister wanted to meet and was anxious to reschedule.

On September 22, 2006, two members of the Committee, Sheila Arthurs and Rick Gadde, the President of the Board, Bruce Simpson, and two staff members, Paula Osmok, Executive Director, and Barbara Hill, Director of Policy Development met with the Arnold Galet, Commissioner of Corrections and a member of his staff, Loretta Eley, Director, Strategic and Operational Initiatives Branch.

We outlined to the Commissioner the history of the Committee, defined our current membership, and provided highlights of the concerns and recommendations for change detailed in the report. He asked many questions, both for the sake of clarification and further information. The Commissioner, in turn, presented the perspective of the Ministry on the matters we brought to his attention and the actions implemented and proposed to date. Special mention was made of the transfer of the Central North Correctional Centre (CNCC) to the public sector and what changes will be made as a result of this in terms of programming and staffing. Note was also made of the changes announced related to making programs available to the remand population in certain institutions and their plans to expand this eventually to the remand population in all institutions. We also discussed the process of designing the two new institutions to replace the Toronto Jail and the Windsor Jail, particularly the plans to consult with community agencies.

In the end, we agreed to certain activities/actions as further follow-up to the recommendations of the report and to these discussions. First and foremost, a meeting with the Minister would be scheduled to coincide with the next Board meeting in December 2006. Secondly, the Committee will participate in a consultation process on the design of the two new institutions, beginning with a briefing by the Project Leads, again to coincide with the next Board meeting in December 2006. Thirdly, the Committee will be provided with updates on Ministry initiatives designed to mitigate the problems/concerns that the Committee identified in the three “superjails.” And finally, in response to our request for the assignment of a senior Ministry official as a contact person to provide on-going updates to the Committee, the Commissioner agreed and asked Loretta Eley to take on this role.

The Committee is now in the process of distributing this Report to a number of agencies/organizations and individuals and posting it on the website of the John Howard Society of Ontario (www.johnhoward.on.ca). Also, the Committee will continue to provide updates on the progress of their follow-up activities through regular reports to the Board and through postings on the website.