

**John Howard Society of Ontario
Committee on Prison Conditions in Ontario
Follow-up to Report on Superjails**

January 2007 Update

Further to discussions with the Commissioner of Corrections (as reported in the “Afterword”), members of the Prison Conditions Committee and staff of the John Howard Society of Ontario held its first meeting with officials from the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services (MCSCS) on December 1, 2006. The purpose was to receive updates on Ministry initiatives designed to mitigate the problems/concerns that the Committee identified in the report. It was co-ordinated by Loretta Eley, the MCSCS contact person for the Committee. The focus of this meeting was programming and prison design.

We received a presentation on the changes to programming that the Ministry has implemented or is in the process of implementing, including the Integrated Service Delivery Framework. Recognizing that most sentenced offenders have a Probation Order following their sentence, there is an obvious need to integrate programs and services offered in the institutions with those in the community. It was also confirmed that the Ministry’s policy with respect to limiting programs and services to sentenced prisoners had been reversed and that some institutions were already offering some programs/services to those on remand, with the intent to expand to all institutions. There was recognition that the programs/services for the remand population have to recognize their status as untried individuals.

We asked specifically about the availability of educational programs and were told that it varied depending on the resources of the School Board in the area where the institution was located. Our inquiries also included the Ministry’s intent with respect to restoring recreation and library services which unfortunately does not appear to be a priority at this point. We indicated that these were matters for which we would continue to advocate.

The Committee also received a presentation about the work of the design teams for the Toronto South and South West Detention Centres (facilities which will replace the Don Jail and the Windsor Jail). While the design process is still in a relatively early stage, we heard that they are working towards a design that is supportive of a direct supervision model, more and accessible program space and good light and noise conditions. All of these are supportive of recommendations contained in the Superjail Report. However the projected size of these facilities (Toronto South 800+ and Windsor 200+), Toronto South in particular, is of concern to us. Not only would this result in institutions that we believe are too large to ensure adequate treatment of prisoners, it would result in greater bed capacity. We do not support the addition of beds to the system. It is our position that imprisonment is overused in Ontario and that the focus should be on the development of community alternatives.

We anticipate hearing more as the design process progresses. As well, we have encouraged our affiliates in the Toronto and Windsor to take part in the stakeholder consultations scheduled to begin in early 2007 as they can bring to the discussion more of a focus on the local issues relevant to design.

The Committee's next steps with respect to the recommendations of the Superjail Report include: arranging a meeting with the Minister providing him with feedback with respect to progress and maintaining on-going communications with Ministry officials, including receiving further updates.

The report has now been more widely distributed. It been viewed and downloaded frequently through our website (our records show over 200 downloads in the first two months of its posting). Our donors have been invited to access it through our website and have been sent a hard-copy of the report when requested. As well, it was distributed electronically to a list prepared by the Committee of interested organizations and individuals including criminal justice agencies and academics.