

**For release on June 7**

**Under embargo until document tabled with the National Assembly**

**Underfunding and overpopulation  
in detention centres**

**SOCIAL REINTEGRATION OF DETAINEES COMPROMISED**

**Québec City, June 7, 2007** – The Québec Ombudsman believes that, given their correctional capacity, detention facilities no longer have the minimum latitude required to carry out their mission properly, and employees work under extremely difficult and highly demanding conditions. This was one of the conclusions Ombudsperson Raymonde Saint-Germain reached in her 2006-2007 annual report, presented to the National Assembly today.

The new *Act respecting the Québec correctional system*, which was adopted in 2002 and entered into force February 5, 2007, places more emphasis on social reintegration, and imposes strict obligations for evaluating those incarcerated and developing the programs to do so. However, the Ombudsperson is concerned whether this central objective will be achieved given the situation as it stands.

She criticizes the fact that this situation persists in spite of having been raised in a 1999 special report from the Québec Ombudsman and in all of its annual reports since. “Not only has the situation failed to improve, but our investigations and visits show that conditions of detention have degenerated,” the Ombudsperson said.

Social reintegration has been neglected as a result. Failing to adequately prepare people for release at the end of their sentence can compromise the safety of the public, correctional services officers, victims and their loved ones, and the people who are incarcerated.

“Social reintegration has often been recognized as the best means of ensuring public safety, and it is among the fundamental objectives of the new law on the correctional system. The Québec Ombudsman intervenes, and will continue to intervene, so that when imprisonment is imposed, it becomes an opportunity to

carefully manage all aspects of cases of offenders, particularly with regards to social reintegration,” Ms. Saint-Germain said.

Overpopulation has a range of effects, and its management monopolizes much of the time of employees in Québec detention centres. Currently, the increase in institutional security procedures and the transfer of excess people to other detention centres seriously limits the ability to monitor rehabilitation.

The Québec Ombudsman examined over 1,588 grounds for complaint from detainees in 17 detention facilities in Québec. In 507 cases, these grounds were substantiated.

### **Offenders suffering from mental health problems: situation under review**

As correctional ombudsman, the Québec Ombudsman is concerned about offenders who suffer from mental health problems. Their numbers are increasing in Québec’s detention centres.

According to the Ombudsperson, there is a greater challenge in managing these cases, which are a concern not only for the Ministère de la Sécurité publique, but also for the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux and, at another level, the Ministère de la Justice.

The Québec Ombudsman questions why so many people suffering from mental health problems regularly find themselves behind bars. This situation has repercussions not only on those incarcerated, but also on those close to them and workers in detention centres. Aside from these initial issues, their preparation for social reintegration in a manner that is suited to their health condition, for their benefit and that of all citizens, is compromised.

There is a glaring need for health services appropriate to the situation of these citizens. They must not be deprived of the care required for their condition by virtue of their detention. The health and social services network must assume responsibility, and offer them the care and services they need for their condition to improve and, most importantly, not deteriorate.

The Ombudsperson believes that it is necessary to examine all procedures and situations that result in the imprisonment of those with mental health problems. The study under way will allow her to make a global, careful and impartial assessment of the possible responses of public services to the complex needs of these citizens. She believes that their management requires concerted effort, medium-term vision and a real concern for controlling risks.

## **Two examples of cases examined by the Québec Ombudsman in 2006-2007**

### *Social reintegration efforts of a detainee compromised by a transfer*

An incarcerated citizen who was recently transferred between institutions complained to the Québec Ombudsman about the impact of this decision on his social reintegration efforts. He was motivated and said that he participated in a variety of therapeutic and educational activities offered by the original institution, including registering for a training course. However, he was transferred because of overpopulation before he could attend a single session of the course, and the new institution did not offer these services, as was also the case for Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, which he attended two evenings a week.

The citizen was concerned about the effect this situation would have when he applied for parole. The employees of the detention facility the Québec Ombudsman contacted were reassuring: the lack of reintegration activities should not have a negative impact on the citizen, because he was not responsible for the situation, and his file confirms his desire to take part in these activities.

Given these comments, the Ombudsperson wonders what actual opportunities are offered to detainees to prepare for their social reintegration. She believes that individual will alone cannot make up for actual access to a supervised social reintegration effort.

### *A sector left without surveillance for almost three hours*

A person with serious diabetes was incarcerated in a cell in the admission area of a detention centre. He contacted the Québec Ombudsman to complain about the lack of surveillance. He reported that he had not been feeling well and called for help, but no one responded.

When it reviewed the situation, the Québec Ombudsman learned that there had been a reorganization of tasks because of overpopulation. Either the tasks were misunderstood or there was an oversight, but regardless, an entire sector was left without surveillance for almost three hours.

Following the complaint, which the citizen filed simultaneously with the Québec Ombudsman and the person responsible for handling complaints at the facility, corrective measures were taken, and surveillance of the area returned to normal.

Source: The Québec Ombudsman

For information:

Dominique Bouchard

Information Officer

Tel.: 418 643-2688

Cell.: 514 346-2643

[dominique.g.bouchard@protecteurducitoyen.qc.ca](mailto:dominique.g.bouchard@protecteurducitoyen.qc.ca)