

THE 2012-2013 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE QUÉBEC OMBUDSMAN  
**Highlights of the report of  
the correctional ombudsman of Québec**

**Québec City, September 25, 2013** – As correctional ombudsman of Québec, the Québec Ombudsman is particularly concerned by shortcomings in services offered to detainees with mental disorders. In a special report published in 2011, it recommended, among other things, that responsibility for delivering socio-sanitary services to detainees be transferred from the Ministère de la Sécurité publique to the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux. It deplores the inertia of these Departments in implementing this recommendation and other solutions aimed at properly tackling mental health problems in detainees. "The years pass and the situation observed in detention centres shows that nothing is being done," states the Ombudsperson, Raymonde Saint-Germain. (Pages 69, 70 and 100, 101)

Apart from healthcare in detention facilities, the correctional ombudsman of Québec's report covers the serious problem of prison overcrowding, the situation of female offenders in the prison system, and social reintegration.

**Prison overcrowding**

(Pages 65, 66) Prison overcrowding is not a recent phenomenon, but it is growing. Managing this situation is a major challenge for Services correctionnels du Québec. The main consequences of overcrowding as ascertained by the Québec Ombudsman are the deterioration of prison conditions, lack of privacy, tension between detainees and with staff, an increase in transfers from one facility to another, wrong classifications, medical appointment postponements and staff exhaustion. The Ministère de la Sécurité publique and detention facilities have set up a number of strategies to counter the effects of overcrowding. Some measures are not effective, while others have negative repercussions:

- The addition of places by building "temporary modular" buildings has had limited impact because, for security reasons, the selection criteria are restrictive.
- The construction of four detention facilities will add only 338 new spaces, since they are to replace outdated facilities due to be closed.

- Transferring prisoners from one facility to another is the main way of countering overcrowding (in 2012-2013 there were 29,290 transfers). The consequences of these repeated transfers are many and include: delays in taking medication, missed medical appointments, distance from family, difficulty accessing lawyers, postponed court appearances and assessment delays.
- Housing two or even three inmates in cells designed for one results in insalubrity and tension.
- When visiting room staff are moved to sector surveillance, it is harder for loved ones and lawyers to visit inmates. This hinders their social reintegration and infringes on their right to be represented.

### **The situation of female offenders in the prison system**

(Pages 67 and 68) Overcrowding has a particular impact on women. Their needs are not always considered by management struggling with an acute shortage of places. The Québec Ombudsman's visits to the Trois-Rivières and Maison Tanguay detention centres, in January and February 2013, revealed major problems: bad hygiene, unsuitable facilities, failings in medication distribution, and shortcomings in the assessment of women's needs. The Québec Ombudsman does however note a willingness on the part of the facilities to implement solutions to these problems.

### **Social reintegration**

(Pages 68 and 69) Inmates serving a sentence of more than six months must be assessed before a sixth of their sentence – or, at the latest, 45 days after the sentence has been handed down – to assess their risk of re-offending and their potential for social reintegration. The Québec Ombudsman notes that the already high number of files assessed outside the prescribed deadlines has risen this year as well (43.8% in 2011-2012; 47.9% in 2012-2013).

The Québec Ombudsman's annual report is posted on its website at [www.protecteurducitoyen.qc.ca/en/annualreport](http://www.protecteurducitoyen.qc.ca/en/annualreport).

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### **Information and requests for interviews:**

Carole-Anne Huot, Communications Adviser  
418 646-7143/418 925-7994 [carole-anne.huot@protecteurducitoyen.qc.ca](mailto:carole-anne.huot@protecteurducitoyen.qc.ca)

Joanne Trudel, Communications Manager  
418 644-0510/418 580-9259 [joanne.trudel@protecteurducitoyen.qc.ca](mailto:joanne.trudel@protecteurducitoyen.qc.ca)

[www.protecteurducitoyen.qc.ca](http://www.protecteurducitoyen.qc.ca)