

NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Ombudsperson recommends prison inspection gaps be closed

Victoria – B.C.'s correctional centres went years without a program of periodic routine inspections Ombudsperson Jay Chalke reported today. The Office of the Ombudsperson's new report, *Under Inspection*, aims at enhancing oversight behind prison walls.

"Together with the power to imprison come legal duties," says Chalke. "A program of prison inspections is mandated by the B.C. Legislature as one key way for society to be assured that correctional centres are operated according to law and in a manner that achieves their objectives: public safety and the correction of criminal behaviour."

The Ombudsperson's independent investigation found the Attorney General and Solicitor General ministries were not in full compliance with their legislated obligations when they put periodic inspection of correctional centres on hiatus in 2001 and did not fully resume a program of inspections until 2012.

"The *Correction Act* and United Nations legal instruments make regular inspections mandatory," says Chalke, whose detailed recommendations include written transition plans when legislative changes move program responsibility from one part of government to another.

Looking at the current inspections program in place since 2012, the Ombudsperson made six recommendations to address shortcomings in inspection procedures and standards. "Changes are needed so that B.C.'s prison inspections program accomplishes its purpose and meets international standards," Chalke says.

All of the Ombudsperson's recommendations have been accepted by government in response to the report. "I am particularly pleased that the Solicitor General has agreed to implement, by early 2018, the new international prison inspection standards set out in the United Nations' Nelson Mandela Rules," says Chalke.

The Office of the Ombudsperson will monitor progress of implementation and report publicly.

Since 1979, the Office of the Ombudsperson has had a statutory mandate from the provincial legislature to uphold fair and reasonable conduct by provincial public authorities. In addition to investigating individual complaints, the Ombudsperson also publishes systemic investigations and recommendations for changes that address administrative unfairness and improve public administration in B.C.