

## **Recognizing Federal Correctional Officers as First Responders and under the Memorial Grant**

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A Position Paper for the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness: The Honourable Ralph Goodale

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July 7, 2019

## Executive Summary

Correctional officers are necessarily first responders within prisons (and at times in the community). However, where correctional officers work means their work as first responders often goes un- or under- recognized, which has led to their being excluded from the Memorial Grant eligibility (see below). Correctional officers too often experience physical and psychological injuries due to their occupation. In the most devastating of cases, correctional officers have and will continue to die in service to public safety. From their recruitment onward each federal correctional officer in Canada carries a card on their person that lists the names of the 34 correctional officers, two women and 32 men, who have died in the line of duty.

Despite the service correctional officers provide to our society, families of fallen correctional officers are not shown the same respect awarded to families protected by the Memorial Grant—the service of a correctional officer is unrecognized if they die in the line of duty. The families of correctional officers, and the officers themselves, have earned and continue each day to earn the respite awarded by the Memorial Grant. Specifically, correctional officers deserve to know that their families, like the family of other first responders, will be given some financial solace if they are to die in the line of duty because their sacrifice is recognized.

*In this position paper, I argue that the sacrifice of correctional officers is under-acknowledged in Canada. Correctional officers are inexplicably not designated as “first responders” and if they die in the line of duty their families are not provided with the payment offered by the Memorial Grant to honor their sacrifice. In what follows I outline why correctional officers should too be recognized as “first responders” and why they deserve to be included under the Memorial Grant.*

I structure this position paper in four sections. In the first section, I contextualize the correction experience. Next, in section two, I describe the Memorial Grant, before outlining why omitting correctional officers from coverage under the Memorial Grant is tragic and unjustified. In the third section I present a brief history of the term “first responder” and in the fourth section I demonstrate why this designation applies to correctional officers. I conclude by reiterating, first, why correctional officers need to be recognized as first responders and, second, why the Canadian government needs to provide the families of correctional officers who die in the line of duty with the lump sum payment tied to the Memorial Grant.

## Introduction: Contextualizing the Correctional Officer Experience

The correctional workplace, specifically prisons, requires correctional officers to provide care, custody, and control for those charged with or convicted of criminal offenses. These responsibilities extend to responding to calls for help (including life-saving assistance) and to fires, and confronting riots, violence, and other potentially traumatic events. These challenging employment conditions negatively affect employee mental health (Cullen, Link, Wolfe, & Frank, 1985; Grossi & Berg, 1991; Hayes, 1985; Summerlin, Oehme, Stern, & Valentine, 2010; Triplett, Mullings, & Scarborough, 1996; Triplett, Mullings, & Scarborough, 1999). Correctional officers are asked to maintain the safety and security of men and women who have often harmed civilians. This can entail being redeployed daily to the same work spaces, often returning to environments where they have experienced or witnessed potentially traumatic events. Drawing on her research in the United Kingdom, Crawley (2013) characterized correctional officer stress as insidious and chronic due to the gradual onset of mental health issues; something that is attributable to multiple factors, including the unpredictable nature of the occupation, particularly challenging prisoners, unsupportive colleagues and management, long working hours, prison layouts, and shift work. In Canada, I have found that officer morale is diminished by virtue of how officers feel unrecognized for the work they do in correctional facilities, as well as in the community when escorting prisoners (Ricciardelli, 2019). Officer stress deteriorates management-officer relations and negatively affects correctional officer mental health and safety. In the United States, correctional officers respond to this situation by disproportionately using sick leave to manage a physical injury or as a “mental health day” (Lambert, Altheimer, & Hogan, 2010; Lambert, Hogan, & Altheimer, 2010; Lambert & Paoline, 2010).



Correctional officers are responsible for the provision of all essential and non-essential services for prisoners as well as the safety and security of prisoners, employees, and the facility (Griffin, Hogan, & Lambert, 2012; Lambert, Hogan, Altheimer, & Wareham, 2010). Correctional officers work in the same space that prisoners live; for prisoners, correctional officers are their connection to the outside and inside world – to lawyers, family, food, hygiene and more (Ricciardelli, 2019; Ricciardelli & Gazso, 2013; Ricciardelli, Power, & Medeiros, 2018). Despite their caretaking role, a 2014 Correctional Services Canada survey evidenced that Canadian correctional officers experience excessive violence; for example, 15% of respondents were physically assaulted more than three times; 17% responded to suicide attempts more than three times; 20% had responded to a riot more than three times; 17% had witnessed murder more than three times; and 50% had witnessed a physical assault more than three times; contributing to 17% of correctional officers having been diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Similarly, in France, researchers concluded that correctional officers who experienced high levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, stress, intrusion, avoidance, and hyper-reactivity were at increased risk of developing PTSD (Boudoukha, Altintas, Rusinek, Fantini-Hauwel, & Hautekeete, 2013). Overall, working in corrections is stressful and laced with trauma potentiality.

The few extant studies indicate high rates of mental illness among correctional officers. In select cases these rates are higher than the rates of other PSP, and definitely higher than the general population (Austin-Ketch et al., 2012; Carleton, Afifi, Turner, Taillieu, Duranceau, et al., 2018; Lambert, Altheimer, et al., 2010; Lambert, Hogan, & Altheimer, 2010; Statistics Canada, 2012; Tartaglino & Safran, 1997). From September 2016 to January 2017, a Canadian Institute for Public Safety Research and Treatment (CIPSRT) team conducted a study of the mental health of Canadian PSP, including correctional employees. They focused, in particular, on measuring the prevalence rates of PTSD, as well as other operational stress and posttraumatic stress injuries and mental health challenges (Carleton, Afifi, Turner, Taillieu, Duranceau, et al., 2018; Carleton, Afifi, Turner, Taillieu, LeBouthillier, et al., 2018; Ricciardelli, Carleton, Groll, & Cramm, 2018). Results indicated that 54.6% of correctional workers screened positive for one or more mental disorders, which was higher than the study average of 44.5%. Self-reported positive screens were much higher than the diagnosed general population epidemiological rate of 10.1% for any mental disorder (Statistics Canada, 2012). Approximately 29.1% of correctional workers self-reported symptoms yielding positive screens for PTSD (29.1%), major depressive disorder (31.1%), and generalized anxiety disorder (23.6%) (Carleton, Afifi, Turner, Taillieu, Duranceau, et al., 2018; Carleton, Afifi, Turner, Taillieu, LeBouthillier, et al., 2018).

## The Memorial Grant

*“When firefighters, police officers and paramedics put their safety on the line, they are acting in service to all Canadians. In recognition of the critical role of first responders in protecting Canadians, the Memorial Grant Program for First Responders provides a one-time lump sum, tax-free maximum payment of \$300,000 to the families of first responders who have died as a result of their duties”*

([www.memorialgrant.ca](http://www.memorialgrant.ca); June 29, 2019).

The Memorial Grant, effective as of 2018, recognizes three groups of PSP as “First Responders”; police officers, paramedics and firefighters. However, these are not the only public safety employees who “put their safety on the line ... acting in service to all Canadians” (<https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/bt/mmrl-grnt-prgrm/index-en.aspx>; June 29, 2019). These are the **only** PSP whose families will receive the one-time payment if they are to die as a consequence of their occupational responsibilities. Thus, many families of those who do serve to keep our society safe will not be awarded the lump-sum payment, which is not designed or intended as compensation for monetary loss or a sort of life insurance; instead the payment is in “recognition of their service and sacrifice” (<https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/bt/mmrl-grnt-prgrm/index-en.aspx>; June 29, 2019).

1870.07.07	Henry Trill
1891.12.05	David Cunningham
1909.04.15	Richard H. Stedman
1912.10.05	John Henry Joynton
1919.05.11	Anton Fladeby
1919.09.29	Joseph A. Purcell
1925.08.19	Stanley H. Byth
1926.06.25	John Williams
1926.08.28	Malcolm Earl Jenkin
1933.02.23	Gabriel Childs
1936.07.13	John J. McCormick
1948.04.26	John D. Kennedy
1961.11.24	William C. Wentworth
1963.05.02	J.E. Raymond Tellier
1964.09.23	Edwin J. Masterton
1974.07.22	Stanley C. Green
1975.04.08	Louis G. Nadeau
1975.06.06	Roy W. Eddy
1975.06.11	Mary Steinhauer
1975.06.27	J.A. Paul Gosselin
1978.02.07	J.L.R. Michel Roy
1978.07.11	P. Guy Fournier
1978.11.26	Francis A.G. Eustace
1978.11.26	J.D. Paul Maurice
1980.10.10	William A. Morrison
1982.07.25	Joseph Y.L. Leblanc
1982.07.25	Joseph B.D. Rivard
1982.07.25	Joseph A.D. Van Den Abeele
1983.04.22	J.R. Serge Delorme
1984.07.13	W. R. Vern Friesen
1984.07.13	Joseph G. Wendt
1997.01.28	Arnold H. Harrison
1999.11.12	T.A. Daniel Rowan
2004.10.06	Louise Pargeter
2018.10.07	Lesa Zoerb

## Defining the “First Responder”

Inquiring into the history of the term “first responder” will net results pertaining to terrorism, military preparedness, and, in the United States, the National Guard. Perhaps one of the

first public uses of “first responders” was in an archived New York Times article by Sexton (1995), who used the term in relation to emergency workers. Sexton (1995) wrote about a pilot project known as the *Certified First Responder Program* that firefighters were resisting because they were concerned the program overly broadened their job description to include medical calls. Ironically, correctional officers today in Canada continue to meet the same challenges of having their job description extended into the realm of healthcare provision, given their daily work includes working with prisoners with mental health issues, and they are often being pushed to straddle the line between health provision and security enforcement.

Starting in 2002, in the era of the “War on Terror,” several reports (“Protecting Emergency Responders” Volumes I-III) were published to boost readiness among emergency workers such as firefighters, police, and paramedics. After 9/11 the term “first responder” was used more consistently in reference to emergency preparedness, but continued to include military preparedness, terrorism, and war. In Canada, the term had also referred to responding to cardiac arrest in hospitals. However, the Canadian emphasis remains on persons who respond to terror threats and those responsible for military/emergency preparedness.

The label of “first responder” has been met with criticism. For example, Rielage (2016) argued to retire the term because it “has outlived its usefulness to the point of becoming detrimental to those who respond first”. Others have argued the term should be restricted to those with the pre-hospital or emergency medical training that is undergone by many emergency/rescue professionals; a training certification that correctional officers do undergo given they engage in pre-hospital responses within their occupational responsibilities (Monroe Community College, n.d.; Wronski, 2000; Rose, 2000).

In 2013, in the United States, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2013) reiterated that the term “first responder” generally refers to law enforcement, firefighters, and emergency medical personnel (EMTs, Paramedics)—especially after 9/11; nevertheless, the definition differs across agencies and levels of government. “First responder” frequently refers to emergency response workers, but there is not a clear definition for legal purposes. Instead, “Emergency Response Providers” is the formal term used in United States funding proposals.

In 2015, Schafer, Sutter and Gibbons (2015) defined first responders as police, firefighter, and EMT/paramedics *only* in a report for the United States Department of Labor, Chief Evaluation Office; however, the same report acknowledged that police/enforcement includes diverse roles ranging from detectives to fish/game wardens to transit and highway patrol officers. Although not central to the report, Schafer et al. (2015) appeared to include those who police those already convicted or charged with crimes living in confined spaces—“correctional officers” and “jailers”. Indeed, in writing that: “*First responders are employed in critical occupations that help to promote and ensure the safety, health and protection of individuals and communities. The jobs of first responders may involve dealing with crisis situations or working in dangerous or unstable environments*” the definition from Schafer et al. (2015, p. 1) could easily include correctional officers.

Federally, in Canada, the Memorial Grant operationalizes “first responders” as exclusively police, paramedics, and firefighters (Public Safety Canada, 2018) and in doing so appears to exclude correctional officers; yet, in Ontario, Canada, federal and provincial correctional officers are officially recognized as first responders (see Bill 163; MacAlpine, 2016) and included in presumptive legislation. Said legislation in British Columbia (Bill M 233; Abedi, 2017; CKNW, 2018; Urquhart, 2019), Alberta (Bill 30; PTSD fact sheet, 2018; correctional officers also qualify for the Alberta Emergency Services Medal [<https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-emergency-services-medal.aspx>]), and Nova Scotia (Labour and Advanced Education, 2017), recognizes and includes correctional officers specifically, while presumptive legislation in Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Newfoundland and Labrador includes all employees and thus has no need to specify occupations for inclusion (Ross, 2017; Bill 205; Ricciardelli & Hall, 2018). Despite the inclusion of correctional officers in presumptive legislation today, in earlier years select provinces such as Ontario and Nova Scotia, like the Memorial Grant, excluded correctional officers from the designation of first responders (and thus correctional officers were not covered under presumptive legislation) and instead followed the same restrictive classification of “first responders” as found in the Memorial Grant: exclusively police, firefighters, and paramedics who do not work in prisons (CSN, 2018).

### Recognizing Correctional Officers as First Responders

As noted, many aspects of correctional officer work parallel that of first responders; for example, correctional officers respond to emergency situations among prisoners in prison or on escorts in the community and first responders respond to such situations only in the community. Other aspects, however, like caretaking work, are more distinctive. Prisoners live, and correctional officers work, in the same space; as such, a career in correctional work ensures a correctional officer serves as much time as a life sentence within prison walls which has an undeniable impact on their mental health and wellbeing. Correctional officers work within this shared confined space and serve as first responders for prisoner populations; as such, correctional officers should be recognized for the life-saving first responding activities in which they engage. For each “call for service”, correctional officers are first responders who must always respond to the emergency needs of those for whom they owe a duty of custodial care, for those who they are required to control, and for their co-workers who need to be kept safe and secure.



*At present the sacrifice of correctional officers is under-acknowledged; first, correctional officers lack the designation of first responder and, second, their families are without the lump sum payment offered by the Memorial Grant if they are to die in the line of duty. Correctional officers continue to ensure public safety through their service; they deserve to have the comfort of knowing their sacrifice will be recognized under the Memorial Grant.*

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