

THE HONOURABLE KIM PATE
SENATOR FOR ONTARIO



L'HONORABLE KIM PATE
SÉNATRICE DE L'ONTARIO

SENATE | SÉNAT
CANADA

13 December 2023

Union of Canadian Correctional Officers
1601, avenue De Lorimier
Montreal, QC
H2K 4M5

Dear Members of UCCO:

Re: Irresponsible Messages Parading as Holiday Greetings

It was with considerable shock and disbelief that I opened your recent card to Members of Parliament and Senators. As you know, it is my practice to always address matters with which I take issue in a clear and direct manner. Unfortunately, since the card is not signed by anyone, it is not evident to whom in your organization I should be directing my concerns. I trust that you will share this with those responsible for the creation and distribution of the cards and bloody syringe style pens.

Your union represents correctional officers, most of whom pride themselves on being consummate correctional professionals. Hence my surprise when I read the misleading and inaccurate information in your card.

For more than 30 years, the infection rates in prisons for both HIV and Hepatitis C (HCV) have been well documented. Disproportionately high rates of infection are largely attributed to the severe lack of programming and supports for those facing addiction who enter prisons and the subsequent sharing of needles amongst those in prison.

Surely our experiences – most recently with the health crises associated with the COVID19 pandemic – underscore the reality that failing to address health risks proactively and effectively in prisons increases public health risks for all in prisons -- staff and prisoners alike -- and then by extension to the general public.

Let's be clear, since the early 1990s correctional and health authorities in Canada and internationally have recommended needle exchange initiatives for prisons. In addition, in response to misinformation being circulated by some, in 2006, the Public Health Agency of Canada released a study of the effectiveness and risk-benefit analysis of a prison needle-exchange program (PNEP) which found that PNEPs could effectively reduce the transmission of HIV and HCV.

The PNEP program aims to implement a harm reduction measure to help address drug use and addictions in federal corrections. Unfortunately, as the Correctional Investigator of Canada has noted, and as your card underscores, the so-called war on drugs and preference of ineffective drug suppression practices is exacerbating the challenges and harms caused by drug use in prisons.

The PNEP program is a critical harm reduction measure, and we urge to examine your roles in fulfilling your professional and personal obligations to uphold the care and custody of all in prison, as well as the safety and security of the public.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "K. Pate". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "K" and a clear "Pate" following.

The Honourable Kim Pate, C.M., B.A., B.Ed. P.D.P.P., J.D., M.Sc.Dip., D.U., LL.D. (h.c.)
Independent Senator

- c. Minister LeBlanc, Public Safety Canada
- Deputy Minister Tupper, Public Safety Canada
- Members of Parliament
- Senators
- Correctional Investigator
- Commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada