

**John Howard Society of Ontario
Committee on Prison Conditions in Ontario
Follow-up to Report on Superjails**

December 2007 Update

Members of the Standing Committee on Prison Conditions in Ontario (“the Committee”) and John Howard Society staff met with senior officials of the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services (MCSCS) on November 30th, 2007, as per the agreement with the Commissioner of Corrections in our discussions with him about the Superjail Report when it was first released (see the Afterword <http://www.johnhoward.on.ca/Library/reports/afterword.pdf>). We subsequently had our first meeting with MCSCS staff in December 2006 (see January 2007 Update <http://www.johnhoward.on.ca/Library/reports/followup-jan07.pdf>).

The purpose of these meetings, which are to take place annually at a minimum, or more frequently if required, is to receive updates on MCSCS initiatives designed to mitigate the problems/concerns that the Committee identified in the report. The meetings are coordinated by Loretta Eley, the MCSCS contact person for the Committee.

The focus of meeting on November 30th, 2007 was again programming and prison design, and, additionally this year, the inmate complaints procedures.

We first received a presentation from the Offender Programmes Unit on the **new 211 system** which provides a directory of justice services and resources in Ontario (available at: <http://www.211toronto.ca/jsr/index.jsp>). While the target audience is primarily MCSCS staff in the institutions (discharge planners in particular) and the community to give them the information needed to better meet the program and services needs of the offender, it is also available to anyone (clients, families, community organizations) who has access to the internet. We then received a presentation on the **Offender Program Tracking**, which will record and track individual client program activity and overall program activity. It will provide a Resource Directory of all programs available for referral. It was noted that they had to first collate program information and make decisions regarding inclusion in the list of what is “available for referral” (delivered on a regular basis, scheduled start/end dates, attendance to be recorded). As well, it will produce reports that record information on individual client’s program activity such as program attendance, completion and history and these reports will be available to corrections staff. They are working towards “core” programs/services – discharge planning, Change of Choices series, life skills and literacy – being available to all in all of their locations but indicated the particular challenges of certain locations and to certain populations (most specifically remand).

We asked about lock-downs in the institutions as they can be a major factor affecting the ability to deliver programs. We were told that they continue to be a significant problem and perhaps are even increasing. The Committee reiterated the recommendation contained in the Superjail Report for action on this front.

We again raised the question of availability of educational programs. We were told that it continues to be varied and depends on the resources of the School Board in the area where the institution is located, with the exception of the Central North Correctional Centre where the local

board is paid for their services to that institution via a contract with MCSCS. As with last year's meeting, we asked about restoring recreation and library services but unfortunately these programs/services still do not appear to be a priority for funding. We restated our belief of the value of these services, especially for remanded prisoners whose participation in other programs/services can be problematic.

The Committee also received an update on the work of the design teams for the Toronto South and South West Detention Centres (facilities which will replace the Don Jail and the Windsor Jail). Apparently the conceptual design phase for Toronto South has been completed. The next stage of the design process, which focuses on the details of the facility, has not yet begun due to the election (which largely precluded the advancement of new initiatives during the campaign) and the appointment of a new Minister (who needs to be fully briefed). We were told that during this phase (which it is anticipated will begin soon), committees would be established to look at specific areas and make recommendations, stakeholder consultations would be carried out and research and training relevant to the new facility could be undertaken. We were told that the planning for the South West Detention Centre is not as advanced because they have the additional task of selecting a site. The process is underway but the site has yet to be selected.

We reiterated our interest in being involved in the consultations with stakeholders and were assured that we and the affiliates in Toronto and Windsor will be involved. We continue to be concerned about the size of these institutions which we have been told will considerably exceed the capacity of the Toronto Jail and the Windsor Jail. Prisons that are too large do not lend themselves to adequate treatment of prisoners. Further, we do not support the addition of beds to the system. It is our position that imprisonment is overused in Ontario and that the focus should be on the development of community alternatives.

The last presentation we received was on the procedures for inmate complaints. We were informed of the internal complaints procedure (to whom the inmate complains, how to complain and the nature and timing of the response) as well as the process for complaining to the Ombudsman of Ontario. We spoke to our concerns about the internal processes given the greater reliance of the Ombudsman to go through the internal mechanism before the complaint is accepted by that office.

The Committee plans to continue to advocate for action, on many fronts, on the recommendations of the Superjail Report, including through these on-going meetings with MCSCS staff and correspondence/meetings with the newly-appointed Minister. It is important to note that the Report continues to be viewed and downloaded frequently through our website which we hope leads to greater public understanding of the problems connected with the Superjails, why we should care and what steps need to be taken.