

For Immediate Release

Nova Institution for Women Ends Critical Support Program for Pregnant Women

November 14, 2016 (Halifax, NS) – In June 2016, there was turnover in the warden position at Nova Institution for Women. Since this time, women inside have no longer had access to volunteer doula services. Women's Wellness Within (WWW): A Partnership Serving Women in Corrections, made up of the IWK Midwives, the Chebucto Family Centre/IWK Volunteer Doula Program, the Elizabeth Fry Societies of Cape Breton and Mainland NS, and the Halifax Branch of the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF), has, among other advocacy and service work, provided volunteer doula support to women incarcerated at Burnside Jail in Dartmouth since 2014 and, at the request of Nova, provided this support at Nova from October 2015-May 2016 to several women.

Corrections Services of Canada did not fund this service at any time. Funding was not cut. Women are now simply being denied access to WWW volunteers. No justification was given. Services were cut without notice. Volunteers have CPIC clearance, criminal and vulnerable sector checks, etc., and have completed required volunteer orientation at Nova. Since June, several women have gone without service in the perinatal period.

Doulas provide emotional, physical and information support to pregnant women before, during and after the birth of their children. They are trained, experienced, and compassionate. They support women's decisions and advocate for access to services. Importantly, women at Nova may apply to the Mother-Child program to keep their babies with them in prison, and doulas provide valuable education and support with breastfeeding, infant care, and parent-child attachment.

Women are the fastest growing population in prison. Women in prison have suffered histories of extreme sexual, physical and emotional abuse. The majority battle mental health struggles and severe addictions. Coming from all across Atlantic Canada to Truro, the women in Nova are without family and friend support for months and years at a time. In pregnancy, these women, and their babies, deserve all the care the world has on offer. Nova is denying these women the support of trained, cleared volunteers.

Pregnancy does not wait. Women's Wellness Within urgently requests that Nova please reinstate access to these critical doula services for pregnant inmates.

For further information, please contact:

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